

An examination of the life of Catherine Schuyler is an approach to a better understanding of the history of the eighteenth century in America. This study is a step toward a needed modern biography of Catherine Schuyler. Her story is a means to explain the role of women in colonial New York by examining the role of one woman in it.

A nineteenth century biography of Catherine Schuyler does not meet modern standards of scholarship in footnoting and bibliography. It was written as a popular history and consequently has all the earmarks of a vivid imagination. No specific documentation is given and, although there are numerous statements that reveal the author's familiarity with primary source material, there are also several errors and a reliance on romantic legends and family traditions.

To this writer's great consternation, the modern biographer of Philip Schuyler, Don R. Gerlach, in his peripheral treatment of Catherine, relies on the same historians for her story whom he castigated for failure to examine all the evidence with regard to Philip's biography.¹ Modern scholarship cannot be selective in the use of primary sources if we are to get a balanced view of our own history.

why did she write a popular history then?

Catherine Schuyler was born into one of the most influential landholding families in colonial New York. Born on November 4, 1734, Catherine was the daughter of John Van Rensselaer, proprietor of the Lower Manor of Rensselaerswyck, and of the former Angelica Livingston, daughter of Robert Livingston, Jr. Her paternal grandfather, Hendrick, was the younger brother of Killian Van Rensselaer, the fourth Patroon.

The family of Colonel John Van Rensselaer "occupied what was known as the 'lower manor house' at Claverack, about forty miles from Albany..."² According to a descendant of Robert Van Rensselaer, Catherine's brother, the manor seat was the present-day Fort Crailo in the City of Rensselaer.³ References by one historian to the seat "at Greenbush" and "in the Crailo"⁴ further the confusion regarding Catherine's childhood home. It is probable that the Claverack house was the dwelling of John's family, at least until the tenant turbulence of the 1750's escalated and the Hampshire Grants controversy materialized. The Crailo house on the east bank of the Hudson River opposite Albany would have afforded greater protection for John's family by removing them from the scene of the disturbances. Residences at both the Claverack and Fort Crailo houses would not have been at all unusual for a proprietor of large landholdings and a member of the tightly woven network of provincial aristocracy.

It can be assumed that Catherine was a member of the social circle that included Abraham Ten Broeck and Philip John Schuyler---her peers in age, family connections and wealth. The acquaintanceship of these three is shown in a letter written by Philip Schuyler in his nineteenth year to his friend Abraham. Schuyler, then in New York, concludes his correspondence to Ten Broeck in Albany with, "But I must say farewell, with love to Peggy, and sweet Kitty V. R. if you see her."⁵ Philip's affectionate appellation for Catherine suggests a fondness, although the courtship prior to their marriage in 1755 remains obscure.

A portrait of Catherine⁶ affirms her attributes as a "lady of

great beauty, shape, and gentility."⁷ She is further described as being "delicate but perfect in form and feature, graceful in her movements and winning in her deportment."⁸ The sweetness of temper which Philip acknowledged was apparently balanced with a great firmness of will.⁹ Philip Schuyler's biographer regards her as "a likely candidate for a wife---a spirited young woman with intellectual powers that Schuyler admired."¹⁰

Catherine was more than a likely candidate for Philip's wife in the summer of 1755. She was with child, and the events directly preceding their marriage, and the marriage itself, affirm the intimacy of the couple. In July and August of 1755, Philip Schuyler, then a captain in the French and Indian War, was north of Albany encamped at the Flatts, preparing for the Battle of Lake George.¹¹ Schuyler "received an express to return to Albany in order (as it was given out) to marry a Miss Kitty Van Rensselaer, the daughter of Colonel John Van Rensselaer of Claverack, on the east side of the river, below the city."¹² Where the Colonel's daughter was involved, the nuptial call took precedence over the battle call. The young captain and his lady received their marriage license on September 4th by posting a bond of L500.¹³ "...the granting of a marriage license by the governor and secretary of the province was a dispensation from the proclamation of banns, and it was a speedier method of marital preparation."¹⁴ Under the customary Roman-Dutch law, reading of the banns would have permitted the marriage "after three Sundays of market days,"¹⁵ an unwanted delay in this case. The couple were wed on Sunday, September 7, and according to one source, in "a ceremony performed by Domine Theodorus Frielinghuysen of the Dutch Reformed Church, Albany,"¹⁶

Controversy has surrounded the marriage date. Historians Lossing,

Tuckerman, Jones, Baxter and Humphreys give Schuyler's wedding date as September 17th.¹⁷

Were this the case, the young captain would have been the returning hero from the Battle of Lake George, home to marry his sweetheart, a romantic viewpoint espoused by one of his biographers.¹⁸ Only Jones admitted Schuyler's absence from the battle scene and his hasty marriage.¹⁹ Another Schuyler biographer, Don R. Gerlach, affirms Philip's own hand in setting September 7 as the correct date, from translating the record kept in the family Bible: "In the year 1755 on the 7th of September did I Philip John Schuyler (being 21 years 9 months and 17 days old) enter the holy state of matrimony with Catherine Van Rensselaer (being 20 years 9 months and 27 days old). The Lord grant this marriage last long and in peace and to his honor."²⁰ The union of Philip and Catherine lasted almost 50 years and, from all indications, was a happy, fruitful one.

Marrying a Van Rensselaer was a propitious event for Schuyler; it meant that "another link in the political-economic ties among the great families of the province had been forged."²¹ "Family tradition of the Van Rensselaers, carried down through the descendants of Robert Van Rensselaer, Catherine's brother, maintained the 'reliable family report' that when Philip Schuyler was married, the equivalent of \$100,000 was settled on his wife, and that the cost of building Schuyler Mansion 'was largely defrayed by her own means!'"²² This reputed dowry hardly seems probable given the facts of Colonel John Bradstreet's endless cash gifts and advances of money to his young friend, Philip. For example, records show that Bradstreet advanced to Schuyler as a gift the L350 needed for the purchase of the parcel of land on which the Mansion was built.²³ For Catherine, the alliance meant a continuation of the economic and social status

she had enjoyed as the Colonel's daughter, both for herself and her issue. The psychological and physical comforts of a home and family of her own were also of no small measure to this colonial woman.

That Catherine was in her fifth month of pregnancy on her wedding day would not apparently have brought rebuke, ridicule or scandal; eighteenth century society was tolerant of the pregnant bride.²⁴ A liberty between the sexes was "evident from large numbers of first babies born seven months or less after a couple's wedding day."²⁵

The first child of the Schuyler marriage was born in February, 1756 and named Angelica for her maternal grandmother. "For women in pre-Revolutionary America, marriage was generally followed by an uninterrupted series of pregnancies throughout the childbearing years."²⁶ Catherine was no exception; from the age of 21 through the age of 47, she bore 15 children.²⁷ The impact of these frequent pregnancies on Catherine, the evidence of multiple births and of the high rate of infant mortality, and above all, the personal loss associated with these pregnancies warrant a more in-depth discussion than has heretofore been conducted by biographers.

A second daughter, Elizabeth, was born in August, 1757, followed thirteen months later with the birth of Margaret in September, 1758. After having bore three children in less than three years, Catherine apparently had three childless years until the summer of 1761. She was in her fourth month of pregnancy when Philip sailed for England in March, for business that would not bring him home again until late November, 1762. In July of 1761 Catherine was delivered of a set of twins. "The boy immediately died without baptism and the other child, christened Cornelia after her paternal grandmother, did not

survive infancy."²⁸

A son was born to the Schuyler in either July or September of 1763.²⁹ He was christened John Bradstreet, the first name perhaps for his paternal grandfather and Bradstreet for Philip's intimate friend and counsel. This child was presumably in full health because Catherine traveled with him to New York in the summer of 1764. In August, while visiting with the family of William Smith, Jr. "the child was taken with a purging which that night began to be mixed with a tinge of Blood."³⁰ He died in that same month, whether the next day or several days later is obscure. His loss was no doubt grievously felt by Catherine, Philip and their three girls.

In 1765, Catherine was delivered of another boy. This son, too, was named John Bradstreet. The Schuylers now had a family of four ten years after their marriage. Three infants had died, at birth or shortly thereafter. Angelica, the oldest daughter, exceeded her infant brother by nine years.

Almost three years separated John Bradstreet's birth and that of the next son, Philip Jeremiah, born in January, 1768. This boy was probably named for his father and great-great grandfather, Philip Pietersen, the founding Schuyler in America. An interval of two and a half years passed before Catherine again gave birth. In July, 1770 she was delivered of triplets who died at birth and were not given Christian names.³¹ The delivery of the multiple births was a life-threatening situation for Catherine as evidenced in a response to Philip from his brother-in-law John Cochran dated July 15, 1770: "I received yours of the 26th June, and am sorry to hear of your Loss and Mrs. Schuyler's dangerous situation; hope she is perfectly recovered."³²

While Schuyler attended the assembly in New York, Mrs. Schuyler was delivered of their twelfth child, a son born on January 29, 1773.³³ He was named Rensselaer for his maternal grandfather. Two years later Cornelia was born. Again, as with John Bradstreet, we see the practice of naming the next born of the same sex, with the Christian name that had been given to the previously deceased child. The John Bradstreet infants were born about two years apart. Cornelia, the fourth surviving daughter, was born fourteen ^{or} years after the death in infancy of the first Cornelia. Her next eldest sister, Margaret, was 17 years her senior. The birth of Cornelia in 1775 marked the Schuyler's twentieth year of marriage. By this time, their family numbered seven children, of which three were sons and four daughters, ranging in age from the baby Cornelia to nineteen-year-old Angelica. During this time span, Catherine and Philip had lost six infants, five having been in two multiple births.

Six years after Cornelia's birth, Catherine, now in her forty-seventh year, was delivered of what was to be her last child, a daughter and her namesake, Catherine Van Rensselaer. Her pregnancy with this child was well-advanced at the occasion of the wedding of the second Schuyler daughter, Elizabeth, to Alexander Hamilton in the Mansion on December 14, 1780. The eldest daughter, Angelica, who had been married to John Barker Church in July of 1777, had already had their first child by 1781, making Catherine a grandmother before the birth of the last child.

Only 14 of the 15 infants that biographer Gerlach assigns to Catherine can be accounted for by this writer. Gerlach's genealogical chart of the Schuylers documents only the surviving children.³⁴

The family records, which would presumably establish Catherine's births, are written in Dutch and have not been fully translated to this writer's knowledge. In the instances where infants died at birth, Christian names were not given; this fact, paired with the repetitious use of the same Christian name in the case of child mortality, compounds the problem of documentation. We do know that two of Catherine's eleven pregnancies were multiple births and that, in both instances, the infants died. This considerable percentage of multiples and the zero survival rate indicate that there were probably far more cases of multiple births in the colony that went unrecorded. During her childbearing cycle, Catherine gave birth on the average of every two years. For the first twenty-seven years of her married life, then, she was generally either pregnant, recuperating from a delivery, or directly involved in infant care. Catherine's days of child-rearing occupied almost the half-century of her marriage.

The facts of Catherine's own early education remain unknown. Customarily this facet of child-rearing was the mother's responsibility and included education in the domestic arts, moral instruction, and learning how to read the Bible. Preparation for marriage was the single most important aspect of a girl's education in the eighteenth century. One historian credits Catherine's acquisition of the social graces to "the gay society inspired by the presence of English officers at Fort Orange."³⁵ According to this same source, she not only spoke and read Dutch and English, but was fluent in French."³⁷ William Smith, an intimate of the Schuylers and an historian of New York, wrote in 1756 of female education: "There is nothing they so generally neglect as Reading and all the Arts for the

improvement of the Mind; in which, I confess we have set them the Example."³⁸

Catherine was obviously literate, as evidenced by her being the recipient of correspondence. For example, in a letter to Philip Schuyler from William Smith dated May, 15, 1761, Smith states: "...Col. Delancey forwarded your Letters to Mrs. Schuyler and Col. Bradstreet by Europe before I got mine from this Post Office---I shall write to her by the first Post."³⁹ Apparently Catherine was the author of correspondence as well, although in 1897, one historian could trace only one letter in her hand.⁴⁰ Modern biographers have found no evidence of Catherine's papers. The only extant proof of her handwriting "is her signature on a document by which she and her husband give the management of the Saratoga estate to their son John Bradstreet Schuyler in 1787."⁴¹

For the development of the high spirit and determination of will that are attributed to Catherine's personality, she had the examples of her accomplished mother-in-law, Cornelia Van Cortlandt and Philip's aunt, Margareta Schuyler of the Flatts. Cornelia possessed a large inherited estate in her own right and, after her husband's death, took out a patent for 1300 acres of land.⁴² "Aunt" Schuyler, as she was referred to by her biographer Anne Grant, was "the arbiter of elegance and morals in Albany."⁴³

According to historian Linda DePauw, "One of the luxuries desired by Americans who had accumulated some wealth and had begun to emulate the style of life of upper-class Europeans was an education beyond the practical that would mark them as persons of taste and culture."⁴⁴ This desire is clearly practiced with respect to the education of the Schuyler daughters, and would satisfy both his

ambitions for an elevated social status and Catherine's needs for time to devote to other formidable responsibilities in her roles as supervisor of the domestic functions of the household and hostess to family, friends, statesmen and dignitaries.

From the evidence of Philip Schuyler's accounts and correspondence, Catherine appears to have had little or no responsibility for their daughters' education in the formal and feminine accomplishments. An entry in Schuyler's account book dated December 29th, 1764 reads:

"To cash paid Mr. Turner their dancing L2.18
1 Quarter: each at 29/Entrance money L2.18"⁴⁵

Another entry for March 5th, 1764 states:

"To cash pd. Mrs. Rugee for 2 quarters schooling
each commencing Aug. 20, 1764 and ending Feb.
20th, 1765 at 25/per quarter..."⁴⁶

Again in 1765, Schuyler records payment for boarding two daughters:

"Sept 7th to 1 yr and 19 days boarding
the young ladies at L80 per annum(for both)"⁴⁷

The expenses are for the daughters Angelica and Elizabeth, who would have been ages nine and eight respectively in 1765. Tuition monies are recorded as paid to Robert Livingston, who is in New York and apparently the overseer of the girls' affairs while they are attending Mrs. Rugee's school nearby. Not only are ^{the} girls absent from Albany during the school quarters but, from the following accounts, they appear to enjoy the invitations of their relatives for extended visits:

From Robert Livingston in New York to Philip Schuyler, Mar. 4th, 1765:

"The young ladies are in perfect health.
Improve in their education in a manner
allmost beyond belief...They pray their

duty, to you and mama, love to their sister long to see you all, but rather here than at Albany."⁴⁸

and from Schuyler's brother-in-law, John Cochran in New Brunswick, in a letter dated February 29th, 1765:

"If the children do not go to Albany in the spring we should be glad if you would permit them to pay us a visit, we would send the nigro wench down for them. The passage of a good day is but a few hours daily and it might be of great service to their health to come into the country at that season for a week or two."⁴⁹

The practice of training their daughters at fashionable schools continued for the last Schuyler young lady, Catherine, as shown in a Schuyler record dated November 11, 1795: "To Miss C.V. R. Schuyler's Entrance."⁵⁰ One can conclude, based on the primary documentation available, that Catherine had little charge and even minimal contact with her children of school age in the course of a year. Perhaps, then, her nurturing efforts were concentrated on each child's early years only. Even the extent of this area of child-rearing is speculative because of the servants and slaves in the Schuyler household. Prevailing attitudes toward child-rearing in the eighteenth century also concentrated on parental respect. It was not until after the middle of that century, that attitudes began to shift perceptibly to a "far greater emphasis on a child's need for love and nurture by its mother."⁵¹

Because there was such a great shortage of labor in pre-industrial America, even wealthy women were directly involved in the chores of housewifery. "...the duties of overseeing a large family, which included numerous servants and slaves, made the mistress of a wealthy

house a combination of housekeeper, factory overseer, and community midwife."⁵² The proof of Catherine's involvement in the fundamental responsibility of cooking is scarce to date. References include a letter from John Hansen at Fort Schuyler, dated November 16, 1776, that relates that he has cured some salmon and intends to send it by the first boat for her acceptance.⁵³ A Boston merchant wrote to Schuyler on February 23, 1777: "...please tell Mrs. Schuyler I sent her the best Sugar I cou'd."⁵⁴ In April of 1777, Richard Varick, Schuyler's aide, conveys this message to his superior officer, then in Philadelphia: "Mrs. Schuyler begs the Favor of You to procure some of the large Strawberries from Mr. Robert Morris Merchant..."⁵⁵ In July of 1777 Catherine sends a variety of liquors and foodstuffs from Saratoga to her husband, who is at a northern post.⁵⁶ Records of the payment for foodstuffs by Schuyler are numerous; however, the fragmentary direct references to Mrs. Schuyler seem to suggest the need for her acceptance or approval, as would be proper in her role as supervisor of the household and a woman of the upper class.

Overseeing the livestock was another activity under Mrs. Schuyler's direction as indicated by this missive written to the Schuylers at Saratoga by his secretary, John Lansing, Jr.:

"Mary is much at a loss as to the Disposition of the Milch cows, which are daily milked by some Rascal before the Men she sends for that purpose get to them. She requested me to beg Mrs. Schuyler's Direction on the Subject. Mary thinks it best to put them in your pasture before the House."

No documentation has been found to date with respect to the maintenance of the kitchen garden being under Catherine's jurisdiction; however, Philip's sister Gertrude, the wife of Dr. John Cochran,

sends "some of the Roots of the Tuberose, which she promised her when at Albany together with some Flower seeds..."⁵⁸ It was not until 1790 that Schuyler had a full-time gardener, thus Mrs. Schuyler may have supervised the work done by the servants and slaves, or perhaps, gardened purely for her own pleasure.

Philip Schuyler's biographer credits Catherine "for making clothes for her husband's slaves."⁵⁹ Without the primary documentation of this assertion, this task seems more romance than fact. In Schuyler's accounts dated April 6th, 1765, the mending of petticoats is a paid service.⁶⁰ One Jenny Wiley is paid for mending the clothes of daughters Elizabeth and Angelica on May 4th, 1765. Several other documented examples of clothing repair and construction further support the use of self-employed seamstresses or tailors for these services.⁶¹ Catherine's brother-in-law, John Cochran, sends a sample of damask Diaper to Albany, "which if Mrs. Schuyler likes it can be made with a Border for Table Linnen...of any length she pleases" and informs her the "glass cloths...will soon be done."⁶² Selection of table linens and concern for the appearance of the fine stemware would fall under Mrs. Schuyler's jurisdiction.

Philip Schuyler reports to his daughter Elizabeth Hamilton in December of 1802: "Your dear Mama, who is all health...actively has her room in the best order for your reception and that of your sister Angelica..."⁶³ Though in her late sixties at this time, apparently Catherine Schuyler is actively involved in the maintenance of her home. In the countless purchases of household items and furnishings, only one account indicates that Madam Schuyler may have made the selections. These purchases from the merchant James Chestney in

Albany, made in May of 1793 included five dozen flat and soup plates, pitchers, mustard pots, salts, butter boats, tureens, sets of chocolate bowls and saucers, a coffee pot, tea pot, and eight red common chairs.⁶⁴ The degree of influence that Catherine had on the selections made for the household cannot be assessed from her husband's account books because he made the payments; however, the correspondence regarding the table linens and the aforementioned purchases attributed to Catherine imply that she is making some choices.

One of the major roles that Catherine played as wife to Philip Schuyler was that of hostess. The first house guest of importance and the man who enjoyed their unwavering hospitality was the British colonel John Bradstreet. Schuyler served under Bradstreet in the French and Indian War and from this time until Bradstreet's death in 1774, the two served each other in countless public and personal capacities, in affairs military, economic and political. Bradstreet wrote to William Smith on December 29, 1761: "I was only a lodger in Schuyler's House in town and am the same here in the Country...:"⁶⁵ The country house Bradstreet referred to is the present-day Schuyler Mansion. Traditions of the Schuyler family maintain that Catherine superintended the building of this house⁶⁶ in 1761. This is highly unlikely due to her advancing pregnancy, her confinement for the birth of twins in late July of that year, and her recuperation from the loss of those infants. Direct supervision of the construction is attributed to Bradstreet with four craftsmen listed as being directly responsible to him.⁶⁷

During the long friendship that Bradstreet and Schuyler enjoyed, Bradstreet owned at least one residence, yet he resided with the

Schuylers for a good portion of those years.⁶⁸ Bradstreet was 22 years older than Schuyler;⁶⁹ for Catherine then she not only had a husband to serve, but a father-figure as well. One historian, who assumed that Bradstreet's role in supervising the Mansion construction inferred ownership, intimated that Bradstreet "not only made a present of the house to Mrs. Schuyler but that their relationship was 'more intimate than Schuyler would have liked."⁷⁰ I concur with Gerlach that this is highly improbable.⁷¹ I can only assume, since there is no primary documentation that points to the contrary, that Catherine's relationship with Bradstreet was an agreeable one, conducted with her husband's best interests in mind. That the Schuyler's first son was named for this family friend indicates an admiration and fondness for the man. That Mrs. Schuyler, as well as her husband, was a beneficiary in Bradstreet's will (his horses and carriages)⁷² is a recognition that implies an appreciation for her as an individual.

Catherine's role as a hostess to distinguished guests was exercised in July of 1772 when Governor William Tryon and his wife visited Albany.⁷³ Other colonial governors such as Sir Henry Moore, Sir Guy Carleton and Olivier DeLancey were among the prominent guests in the pre-Revolutionary period.⁷⁴ During the Revolution Benjamin Franklin, Charles Carroll and, of course, the Schuyler's son-in-law, Alexander Hamilton, enjoyed their hospitality. Schuyler's sense of propriety, diplomacy and magnanimity was extended to his defeated enemies during the Revolution as well. These included General John Burgoyne and his retinue, the head of the German troops, Baron Riedesel and his wife and children and the commander of the British grenadiers, Major Ackland and his wife, Lady Harriet.⁷⁵

General Burgoyne was apparently so impressed with the kindness

extended to him at the Schuyler home that, after his return to England, he reported to the House of Commons in 1778 that "in that house I remained during my whole stay in Albany, with a table with more than twenty covers for me and my friends, and every other possible demonstration of hospitality."⁷⁶ During Burgoyne's confinement in Schuyler's Albany house, Schuyler himself stayed at Saratoga, presumably to oversee his wife-ravaged house and to avoid the possibility of any confrontations. This meant, then, that Catherine had the management of the household in her husband's absence and was responsible for the hospitality that Burgoyne praised so highly.

The correspondence written to Schuyler by his military aide, Richard Varick, who was at the Albany house during Burgoyne's stay makes it very clear that this hospitable act was fraught with problems. On October 24, 1777 Varick writes, "Genl. Burgoyne and Reidesel with their Retinues are still here, they give Mrs. Schuyler no small trouble..." On the same day John Lansing, Jr., Schuyler's secretary, who is also at Albany reports:

"The Rifle-Men and Light Infantry being encamped on the Hill back of the House render the Tenure on which the potatoes are held exceeding precarious. Mrs. Schuyler has detained the Servants for the purpose of securing them. The Servants will be sent up to Morrow. Your Fencing on the Hill is mostly appropriated by the Troops and applied to sheltering them, and all that can be obtained from the officers is a promise that they will not suffer the Materials to be burned or destroyed...General Brugoyne Suite and Visitors have entirely discomposed the Oeconomy of the Family and have given no small Degree of Trouble to Mrs. Schuyler, They intend to stay till Wednesday."⁷⁷

The detachments referred to are obviously there for the purpose

of guarding the enemies and preventing their escape. In the process of their encampment, however, they have not only torn up the fencing, but threaten the valuable potato crop. It can be assumed that the servants were not unscathed in their efforts to secure the potatoes. This assumption is confirmed by a letter written by Varick to Schuyler on October 26th:

"Genl. Burgoyne & his Suite are still here. Nor is it certain that they will go to Morrow. We are disappointed from Day to Day, Mrs. Schuyler has a great Deal of Trouble with them, and her servants." 78

Burgoyne's party did at last leave on October 26th. It is entirely a credit to Catherine that public reports of the hospitality to these enemies were favorable, despite the havoc that obviously was created by their presence and the hardship that Catherine personally faced as their hostess.

Catherine's graciousness under pressure was again exhibited to General Horatio Gates, her husband's former protagonist for control of the Northern Department. On April 18, 1777, Varick wrote to Schuyler, who was then in Philadelphia, that Mrs. Schuyler directed him to wait upon Gates immediately upon his arrival and to invite him to "take a bed here;" although this offer was declined, General Gates came to breakfast with Mrs. Schuyler the following morning.⁷⁹

In the 1780's George Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette, Baron Steuben and other figures prominent in the Revolution joined the list of guests to receive the Schuyler hospitality. John Jay, Gouverneur Morris and the Chancellors Kent and Livingston also visited in connection with efforts for the adoption of the Federal Constitution. In the 1790's, when Philip Schuyler actively promoted canal construc-

tion, eminent engineers from France, Sweden and England came to Albany to confer with him.⁸⁰

One must conjecture that the diplomacy, composure, polite conversation and strict household efficiency that Catherine had by necessity to exhibit to the many foreign and national dignitaries could be relaxed for close friends and family members. William Smith, Jr., a close friend, demonstrates a sense of humor when he informs Schuyler that "our whole family intend to give ourselves the pleasure and you the trouble of a visit next month."⁸¹

Gertrude Schuyler, Philip's sister, has written to her husband, John Cochran of her visit with her brother's family and Cochran replies to Schuyler: "I am much oblig'd to you for the friendship & kind treatment she writes me she has received at your and your brothers hands..."⁸² Philip Schuyler projects a filial affection for his little grandson by stating that, "I shall embrace him here"⁸³ in a letter written to his daughter Elizabeth Hamilton in anticipation of a their visit to Albany in December, 1802.

One of the most poignant letters this writer has encountered in her survey of the Schuyler papers is one written to Philip and Catherine by Catherine's brother, Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, imploring their kindness and hospitality to his wife, Judith Bayard:

"Dear Brother and Sister,

In my father's letter I wrote that I was incapable of writing to you but I see the necessity which obliges me to write in order to desire a favour. I am in a low state of health for the recovery of which I embark next Monday for South Carolina. If it should happen to turn out with me contrary than what we Expect Whether you will take under your kind protection my Dr beloved wife who I can

say will prove to be a kind sister and a faithful Friend. It affords me more pain and Anxiety than Death itself to think that she should remain among her relation who soon would torment her to Death, even now while I still live here is no rest night nor day when the Sister has Exhausted herself with imprecations and oaths on Judith comes the Father after his night cup, finds fault with whatever he sees and the only person charged is his Daughter who has no concern with it pray as this is now already the case what will it be if it should happen that I am no more. Do not neglect her for my sake, as she desires to live with you and professes your friendship above all."⁸⁴

The frankness with which Jeremiah writes in 1763 of an intolerable home situation is the penning of a desperate man and, consequently, a glimpse of the dark side of life that can seldom be documented by the historian. Judith's fate with respect to her dependency on family, was the fate of almost every single or widowed woman in the eighteenth century. It must be assumed that this letter would not have been written to the Schuylers had they not already shown the qualities of compassion that the request demands.

Not all of their contemporaries looked upon the Schuylers as warm and gracious hosts. In a passage that the Marquis de Chastellux deleted before the accounts of his travels in 1781 were published, he recorded:

"My plan, and that of my traveling companions, was to send and ask General Schuyler to have us for dinner; I had observed however that Mrs. Schuyler was a big Dutchwoman, with a rather serious disposition, and that she appeared to be the mistress of the house: I thought it best not to treat her in too cavalier a fashion, and as I knew that she was informed of my return, I thought it more appropriate to temporize, and I did well to do so. Indeed, Colonel Hamilton came to see me during the morning, appeared a bit embarrassed and gave me no invitation. I promised to call on the General during the evening...At six o'clock in the evening we were sent for in sleighs and went to

General's Schuyler's house. We found him in his drawing room along with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton; we were told that Mrs. Schuyler was indisposed and we took this at face value...leaving the rest of the company with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, we went into another room where we found Mrs. and Miss Schuyler by the fireside, appearing to be in rather good health..."⁸⁵

The Marquis' assessment of Catherine's good health may not have been accurate; he also may have expected too much in terms of their hospitality, and would then be disappointed with anything less. A neighbor of the Schuylers, Robert S. Van Rensselaer, writes to his sister from London in 1796 that he has met Angelica Schuyler Church there and makes these observations:

"The difference between Mrs. Church and the other members of Gen. Schuyler's family, near us in Albany, is inconceivable. She all affectionate and polite, endeavoring to please those around her, while the others, first kin to the fallen Angel, are swelling with pride and pomposity."⁸⁶

Robert's branch of the Van Rensselaer family were not immediate kin to Catherine's branch, and apparently did not enjoy the elevated social and economic status of Catherine's family. These families did not socialize, and that might explain his harsh assessment of the general's family.

In concluding Catherine's role as hostess, it should be remembered that almost every time a visitor graced their door, it meant for Catherine the setting of an extra plate, that there was ample food, that a bed was prepared, that the proper courtesies were extended. As manager of the household, Catherine shouldered the responsibilities attendant to the comfort of their guests.

Catherine's role as wife to Philip Schuyler has been discussed

with regard to her bearing and rearing his children, supervising the domestic operations of his household, and fulfilling the duties of hostess. That she was his subordinate in the marriage was both a legal constraint and an acceptable social attitude in the eighteenth century.⁸⁷ It is extremely difficult to assess the personal relationship the two shared in the absence of any of Catherine's correspondence.

In his letters to his wife, Philip always addressed her as "My Dear Love." This would perhaps be interpreted with a much more romantic connotation had this writer not encountered a report of Albany society attributed to the travel accounts of de Rochefoucauld-Liancourt: "They live retired in their homes with their wives...and with whom they scarcely exchange thirty words a day, although they always address them as 'my love'."⁸⁸

The Schuylers certainly did not live retired in their home. Philip's frequent and far-ranging travels took him to northern New York, Saratoga, New York City and Philadelphia, absenting him from the Albany house, sometimes for days, and sometimes for months at a time. The correspondence of family members, friends, Schuyler's military aides and his secretary confirm that Catherine, too, is much more a mobile member of society than was previously assumed. She visits the Robert Livingstons and the William Smiths in New York, as well as the Hamiltons. She travels with her husband to Philadelphia, and for example, during the summer of 1777, she is constantly back and forth between Albany and Saratoga.⁸⁹

Philip's frequent travels, and the letters he writes to his wife as a result of them, do provide some insight for understanding their personal relationship. Philip always reports of his state of

health to Catherine, perhaps both to assure her not to worry, or, when he is in ill health, to give her the assessment of his condition directly from him. His letters are mixed with accounts of his commercial and political activities, and this can be interpreted to indicate that Philip recognizes his wife's intellectual capacities. He also sends her news of their mutual friends and acquaintances, as if to keep her well-informed of the most recent happenings.

It is common, too, for Philip to send his wife fresh fish and shellfish, citrus fruits, and seeds, all in small amounts;⁹⁰ this may imply their scarcity and intended personal use. It is a thoughtful gesture on the part of a busy man to take the time to make these purchases and arrange for their shipment. One can imagine that their receipt would bring great pleasure.

One of the most revealing expressions of Catherine's worth to her husband is written in a directive to his son, John Bradstreet, regarding the transfer of the Saratoga country seat:

"I must however not omit to inform you that the Income of all my estate except what you and Your brothers and sisters may actually occupy at my decease will be enjoyed by your dear Mama; she merits this attention in a most eminent degree, and I shall even give her a power to change my Disposition of that part of my estate the income of which she will enjoy, should unhappily the conduct of my children be such as to render it necessary; but I trust they are and will be so deeply impressed with a sense of the infinite obligation they are under to her as not to give her a moment's uneasiness." 91

That Philip Schuyler gives his wife the power to change the disposition of his will, should it become necessary, shows the high regard with which he merits her welfare.

Philip Schuyler outlived his wife by more than a year. She died

on March 7, 1803 in her sixty-eighth year. One historian claims that she died suddenly of apoplexy.⁹² The general's grief, and that of their children at her loss is implied in this letter written by Alexander Hamilton to his wife, Elizabeth, who is at Albany:

"I have anticipated with dread your interview with your father. I hope your prudence and fortitude have been a match for your sensibility. Remember that the main object of the visit is to console him that his own burden is sufficient, and that it would be too much to have it increased by the sorrows of his children."⁹³

The scraps of evidence in the writings of others, when compiled, make it possible for an individual to emerge. The examination of that individual helps us to understand the history of an era. Through the emergence of Catherine Schuyler, the role of women in colonial New York is further defined, as is her role.

FOOTNOTES

¹Don R. Gerlach, Philip Schuyler and the American Revolution in New York, 1733-1777 (Lincoln, 1964), Introduction, XIV, XV.

²Mary Gay Humphreys, Catherine Schuyler (New York, 1897), p. 2. Gerlach, p. 17.

³Schuyler Mansion: A Historic Structure Report (Albany, 1979), p.6.

⁴Katharine Schuyler Baxter, Godchild of Washington (New York, 1897), p. 40; p. 395.

⁵Gerlach, p. 14.

⁶Portrait of Catherine Schuyler, New-York Historical Society.

⁷Gerlach, p. 19.

⁸Humphreys, p. 22.

⁹Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰Gerlach, p. 14.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹²Ibid., p. 17.

¹³Gerlach, p. 18, footnote 43.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Baxter, p. 40.

¹⁷Gerlach, p. 17, footnotes 40 and 41. Humphreys, p. 20. Baxter, p. 40.

¹⁸Humphreys, p. 21.

¹⁹Gerlach, p. 17, footnote 41.

²⁰Ibid., p. 18

²¹Ibid., p. 20.

²²Historic Structure Report, p. 5.

²³Ibid., p. 9.

²⁴Linda Grant DePauw and Conover Hunt, Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815 (New York, 1976), p. 14.

- ²⁵ DePauw and Hunt, p. 14.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 21.
- ²⁷ Gerlach, p. 314.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 38.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 74. Humphreys, p. 86.
- ³⁰ Wm. Smith, Jr. to Schuyler, August 8, 1764.
New York Public Library, Box 23.
- ³¹ Gerlach, p. 209.
- ³² John Cochran to Schuyler, July 15, 1770.
New York Public Library, Box 23.
- ³³ Gerlach, p. 226.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 314.
- ³⁵ Humphreys, p. 10.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 12.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 10.
- ³⁹ Wm. Smith to Philip Schuyler. New York Public
Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 2.
- ⁴⁰ Humphreys, p. 190.
- ⁴¹ Gerlach, p. 19, footnote 45.
- ⁴² Humphreys, p. 29.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ DePauw, p. 97.
- ⁴⁵ Colonel Philip Schuyler to Robert Livingston.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Robert Livingston to Philip Schuyler. New York
Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 23.
- ⁴⁹ John Cochran to Philip Schuyler, February 29, 1765.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 23.

⁵⁰ Philip Schuyler Esq. to G. & N. Lilly,
Nov. 11, 1795. New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers.

⁵¹ DePauw, p. 21.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Abraham Livingston to Philip Schuyler, February
23, 1777. New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 32.

⁵⁴ Richard Varick to Philip Schuyler, April 7, 1777.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 32.

⁵⁵ Henry B. Livingston, July 30, 1777. New York
Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 33.

⁵⁶ John Lansing, Jr. to Philip Schuyler, November 7,
1777. New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 33.

⁵⁷ John Cochran, Jr. to Philip Schuyler, April 10, 1777.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 38.

⁵⁸ Gerlach, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Col. Philip Schuyler to Robert Livingston.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Schuyler to Livingston, New York Public Library
Schuyler Papers, Box

⁶³ John Cochran to Philip Schuyler, New York Public
Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 23.

⁶⁴ Philip Schuyler to Mrs. Hamilton, Dec. 21, 1802.
Princeton University Library, Manuscript Collections.

⁶⁵ Accounts, Personal and Household, 1792-1794.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 3.

⁶⁶ Humphreys, p. 65.

⁶⁷ Historic Structure Report, p. 18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Gerlach, p. 39.

⁷¹ Ibid.

- ⁷² Gerlach, p. 240.
- ⁷³ Ibid., p.222.
- ⁷⁴ Historic Structure Report, p. 28.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Historic Structure Report, p. 29.
- ⁷⁷ John Lansing, Jr. to Philip Schuyler.
New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Box 33.
- ⁷⁸ Richard Varick to Philip Schuyler. Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Richard Varick to Philip Schuyler. Ibid. Box 32.
- ⁸⁰ Historic Structure Report, p. 29.
- ⁸¹ Wm. Smith, Jr. to Philip Schuyler, undated.
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- ⁸² John Cochran to Philip Schuyler, July 20, 1764.
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- ⁸³ Philip Schuyler to Elizabeth Hamilton, December 1802. Princeton University Library, Manuscript Collections.
- ⁸⁴ Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, October 28, 1763.
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- ⁸⁵ Historic Structure Report, p. 29.
- ⁸⁶ Catharina V.R. Bonney, A Legacy of Historic Gleanings, p. 127.
- ⁸⁷ DePauw, p. 12.
- ⁸⁸ Humphreys, p. 11.
- ⁸⁹ New York Public Library, Schuyler Papers, Boxes 31, 33.
- ⁹⁰ Baxter, pp. 312-313.
- ⁹¹ Godchild of Washington, p. 200.
- ⁹² Humphreys, p. 239.
- ⁹³ Baxter, p. 399.

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CATHERINE SCHUYLER: THE STUDY OF AN INDIVIDUAL
 FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF AN ERA

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