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A GROUNDS REPORT OF THE  
GENERAL PHILIP SCHUYLER PROPERTY

Linda M. White

Summer 1982

The General Philip Schuyler estate was the site of great activity before, during and after the Revolution. Much of the activity dealt with the farming, the saw mills, a grist mill and the first flax mill in the American colonies. The General had a "grand" house built on this property which he and his family occupied when not at "The Pastures" in Albany. It was this house that the British burned when retreating after the second battle at Saratoga. Soon afterwards a second house was constructed and is the one standing at present. There has been much controversy concerning the locations of these structures. The question is: Was the second house built on the foundation of the first house or was this present structure built in a different location? Also there seems to be discrepancies in how long it took for the construction of the second house to be completed. These are some of the questions which have prompted the research in this grounds report. Other questions include: What did the landscape of the property entail before, during and after the Revolution? What types of trees and shrubs were existing and what were the gardens like? Were the lilacs that are growing today, present during the life of the General? It is hoped through the information brought out in this report, that some of the answers to those questions may be revealed.

A comment must be made at this time pertaining to the research. Not a great deal of information was to be had regarding the trees, shrubs, gardens and site of the General's original house after exhausting the resources the Saratoga NHP has to offer. It is felt

a great deal of information would be gained from a major set of resources not yet available to this Park. These resources are the Schuyler Papers, which are in the New York Public Library and in part at the Schuyler Mansion in Albany. It is anticipated that enough interest and enthusiasm can be mustered so the Schuyler Papers may be obtained in the very near future by Saratoga NHP. Without those Papers, vast quantities of material (not available elsewhere) dealing with the Schuyler Property will never be known and many questions will have to remain unanswered.

The information to follow will be set up according to specific subjects. Most of the information will be given in direct quotes with author listed and then a general comment will proceed for each subject area.

House Sites

- That Saratoga estate was bequeathed by the murdered owner to his nephew Philip (the General), who built a country mansion, elegant for the times, near the site of the old one, and occupied it when Burgoyne invaded the valley in 1777. During that invasion the general's house and mills were burned by Burgoyne's orders. (B. Lossing, p. 89)
- The mansion was rebuilt immediately after the campaign was over, a few rods from the site of the old one, but in a style much inferior in beauty and expense. (B. Lossing, p. 89)
- From the field of surrender I walked to Major Philip Schuyler's, a grandson of General Schuyler. His house stands on the opposite side of Fish Creek, a few yards in front of the General's which was burnt by Gen. Burgoyne.  
 After paying my respects to Major Schuyler and his family, Mrs. Schuyler walked out with me to the spot where Gen. Schuyler's house stood. The length and breadth of the house was distinctly seen, being sunk below the adjoining ground. (A. Royall)
- The new house erected at the close of the French war was placed about 12 rods west of the "old lilacs," and exactly south of the present Schuyler mansion, belonging to George Strover. (N. Sylvester, p. 261)

- We passed the ruins of General Schuyler's house, which are still conspicuous, and hastened to the field where the British troops grounded their arms. Although, in 1797, I paced it over in juvenile enthusiasm, I felt scarcely less interested on the present occasion, and again walked over the whole tract. (Silliman); 134

These are just a few of the references that could be found which deal with sites of the Schuyler houses. They all seem to indicate that the present structure is not on the site of the first house of the General, the one burned by Burgoyne. Therefore, we can assume that the foundation of the present structure could not be the same foundation as the original house. Maybe these statements will help to clear up this controversy.

As to the exact location of the original structure more specific information is needed, but it seems very probable that it is the depression you notice looking off to the right as you approach the present Schuyler House from the walkway.

### Present House Construction

- Down on the flat, in the angle between the mouth of the Fishkill and the Hudson River, stands the mansion of Maj.-Gen. Philip Schuyler, which he rebuilt in sixty days - Stone says fifteen - after the Burgoyne surrender, to replace the dwelling which had been burned by order of the British general. (J. Watts de Peyster)
- Leaving the bridge we come next to the Schuyler mansion, embowered in its grove of ancient trees. This was erected by Gen. Philip Schuyler in the month of November, 1777. The main house was put up in seventeen days by the artisans of Gates' army. (J. H. Brandow, p. 373)

There is much discrepancy as to how long it took to build the present house and there will continue to be until further information can be attained.

Grounds and Vegetation

- It was the general's country-seat (his town residence being in Albany) until his death in 1804, and was still preserved in its original form at the time of our visit, and surrounded by beautiful shady trees, many of which were planted by the master's own hand. It was then the residence of George Strover, Esq., who took pleasure in preserving it as General Schuyler left it. (B. Lossing, pp.89-90)
- Leaving the bridge we come next to the Schuyler mansion, embowered in its grove of ancient trees. (J. H. Brandow, p.373)
- The spacious grounds in front were not so full of trees in the early part of the century as now. They were then arranged in clumps and considerable space was given to shrubs and lawn. At that time a lawn ran unobstructed from the rear of the house eastward to the banks of the canal. (J. H. Brandow, 2nd edition, pp.329-330).
- After paying my respects to Major Schuyler and his family, Mrs. Schuyler walked out with me to the spot where Gen. Schuyler's house stood. His garden is also visible, being near the house, and the rose bushes and lilies are still fresh and green. The house in which Major P. Schuyler now lives, was built by the General himself a few days after the other was burnt. Four lofty locust trees stand in front of the house; two of these were planted by General Schuyler himself, and two by the Major's mother. (A. Royall)

Lilac Bushes

- It was then the residence of George Strover, Esq., who took great pleasure in preserving it as General Schuyler left it. Even some ancient lilac shrubs, now quite lofty trees, gnarled and unsightly, that were in the garden of the old mansion, were cherished as precious mementoes of the past. (B. Lossing, p. 90)
- The lilac bushes at the bottom of the excavation southeast of the house are descendants of the large ones that once ornamented the garden of house No. 2, burned by Burgoyne. (J. H. Brandow, 2nd edition, p.330)
- The old Schuyler mansion, which the French and Indians burned; stood east of the "old lilacs." In widening the canal a few years ago the cellar was opened, and many relics obtained. The new house erected at the close of the French war was placed about twelve rods west of the "old lilacs," and exactly south of the present Schuyler mansion, belonging to George Strover. The lilac-bushes themselves are venerable enough to be objects of curiosity. They were undoubtedly planted either in the time of the first or the second Schuyler house, and must certainly

be more than one hundred years old, perhaps one hundred and forty. They are evidently vigorous enough to last till the second centennial of the republic. (N. Sylvester, p. 261)

From the bits and pieces of information and the illustrations included (they depict the grounds many years after the Revolution), it is difficult to come up with an accurate description of the grounds and what they entailed. It seems that there were a good number of trees on the grounds, many of which could have been Black Locust, as there are today. The Black Locust trees of the present are most likely the descendents of the ones planted by the General and his family and perhaps a few may even date back to the early 1800's. An attempt was made to determine the age of a few of the large Black Locust with a core sample but because of the denseness of the wood the results were not very accurate. Some of the other trees such as the enormous Hackberries and Sugar Maples may date back to the late 1700's - if only they could talk!

Of particular interest are the "old lilacs" still growing on the property. They can be considered the most significant vegetation on the grounds as it may be reasonable to assume they were there during the Revolution and possible even earlier. If these lilac bushes were not the ones present in 1777 there is little doubt that those bushes are the direct descendents of the original ones.

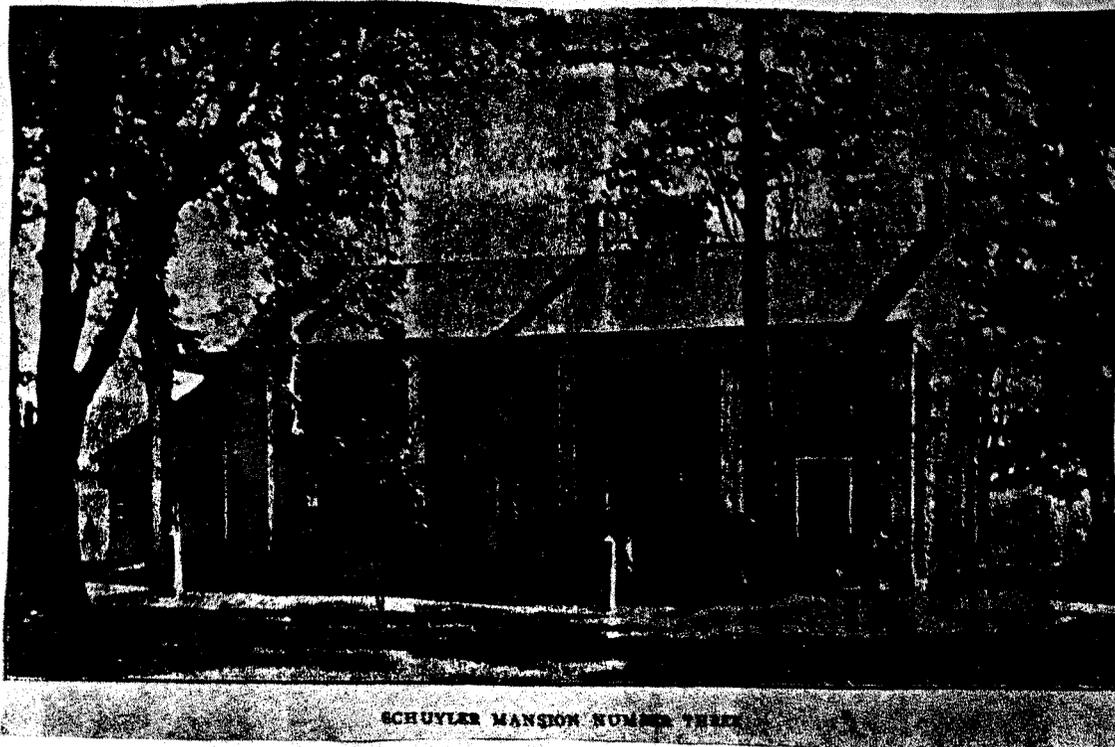
Many details of the gardens and plantings remain to be found. Other questions dealing with the house sites, how long it took for construction, etc. are yet to be answered satisfactorily.

It is hoped that the information in this report, brief as it is, gave some insight into the history of the grounds. If the Property of General Philip Schuyler is to be maintained in the manner of

the late 1700's the the old trees and especially the lilac bushes need to be preserved as reminders of the potent past.



(B. Lossing, p. 90) Circa 1866



(J. H. Brandow 2nd edition, p. 324) 1919

Schoylerville (Old Saratoga)



(N. Sylvester, p. 260) Circa 1878



PLATE VII

JUNE 25, 1959 3:30 PM FILM PACK 15, NOS. 2B & 3A & B

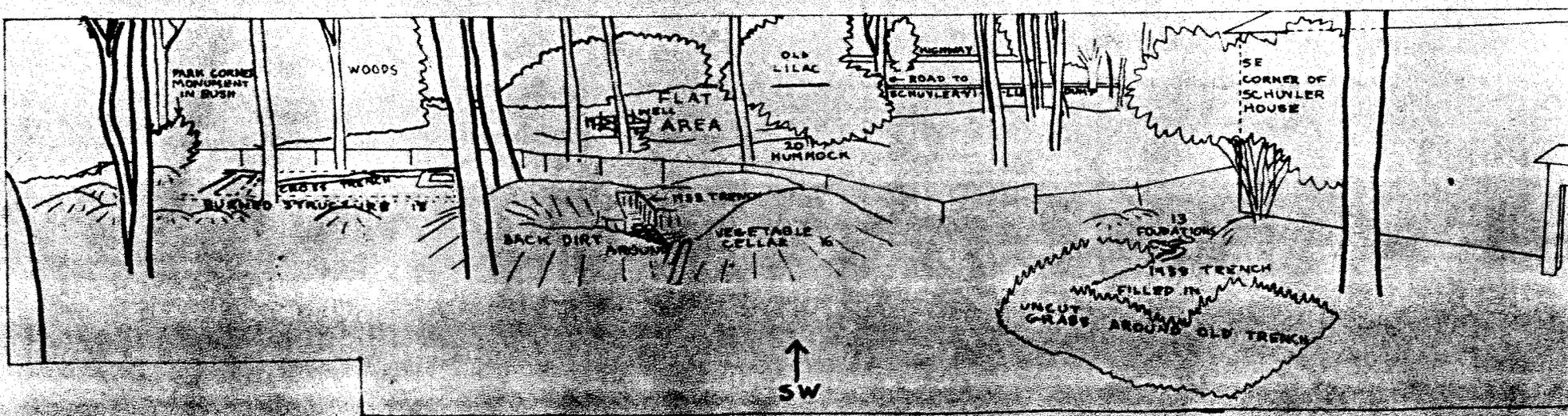


DIAGRAM OF PLATE VII

MOSAIC PANORAMA, GROUNDS SW, S, AND SE OF HOUSE

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

# Memorandum

TO : White's Grounds Report

DATE: 30 Sept 82

FROM : Chief Ranger, SARA

SUBJECT: Editorial Note

Accompanying the Grounds Report of the General Philip Schuyler Property is a pencil tracing of the grounds map, containing updated vegetative data as found in June 1982. This data updates a 1951 horticultural map detailing individual trees and locations.

Linda had also included information on lesser vegetation, such as the lilacs, not included on the 1951 original, as well as conjectural locations of original Schuler garden plots and structures.



5010-109

This map is located in Ranger map storage case, filed under Schuyler house.

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Linda M. White

Summer 1982