

SARA.028

CRBIB# 000826

374/133084

HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT  
JOHN NEILSON HOUSE  
PART I

BY: JOHN F. LUZADER

H30  
(NER OM)

MAR 19 1969

Memorandum

To: Director  
Attention: Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic  
Preservation

From: Regional Director, Northeast Region

Subject: Neilson House, Saratoga

We enclose a copy of Acting Superintendent Stratton's March 12 memorandum and its enclosures. The Park's need for almost immediate assistance in this unusual type of historic building stabilization was brought to our attention by telephone on March 7. The architect in our Regional Division of Maintenance, Jack Lukens, reported it by telephone to Architect Judd of your Office on March 10. Mr. Lukens discussed it further on March 14 with Architects Nelson and Hartshorne at Independence.

Architect Lukens has some thoughts on remedial treatment which will be summarized below for your consideration. He recommends, however, in view of the easily-damaged nature of the interior finish and the acting superintendent's statement, " \*\*\* our own maintenance crew does not feel qualified to attempt such a critical job," that your Office be asked to take charge of the repair work. We are hopeful that you may be able to arrange this in the near future, as it will be necessary to keep the Neilson House closed to visitors and the front porch roped off until it is accomplished.

Mr. Lukens' analysis of the condition is as follows:

1. The building was moved to its present site and restored with the wall-construction (heavy studs with unburned brick nogging between them) exposed on the interior and painted. Electric heating was installed during the restoration. We think that the heating has caused the nogging and/or the wood framing to shrink so that there is now a crack around every panel of brickwork and there is no bond or key to retain the brickwork from falling into the interior.

2. We first thought of injecting plaster of Paris into the cracks around the brick panels. This would set quickly and expand to make the panels tight. Then we thought that a non-shrinking grout would be better, since it would not deteriorate from dampness as plaster of Paris would. The objection to both of these ideas would be that no room would be left for subsequent expansion of the materials which might cause crumbling or buckling of the brick panels or distortion of the building.

3. We then considered packing the cracks with strands of untarred oakum to wedge the brick panels in place and then caulking the surface with an elastic material. We are somewhat doubtful that this would provide sufficiently positive retention of the brick panels under conditions of seasonal expansion and contraction, and there is still the problem of making the surface appear as it did originally.

4. The question arises whether the electric heating system should be used and, if so, exactly how it should be used in this building.

5. The chief consideration appears to be how to preserve this restoration as an exhibit. In order to avoid damaging it by improper treatment, we feel very strongly that its present condition should be investigated and its remedial treatment and future care should be prescribed by your Office.

We shall appreciate it if your personnel will please investigate the reported wet condition of the Schuyler House basement while visiting the Park to assist us in caring for the Neilson House. Mr. Lukens is planning to leave the Government service in about 2 weeks and it may take some time to obtain a successor for him.

In view of the urgency of the Neilson House problem, we would appreciate your letting us know as soon as possible when you expect to be able to schedule the requested investigation.

(SGN) LEMUEL A. GARRISON

Lemuel A. Garrison

Enclosures

cc:

Supt., Saratoga

Dr. Nelligan ✓  
Programs



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30  
XD22  
XD6215  
X57023

August 8, 1963

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Northeast Region

From: Superintendent, Saratoga NHP

Subject: John Neilson House

As promised in my memorandum of August 5, on the subject matter, the Furnishings and Exhibition Data, section 10, Part I, Historic Building Report for the subject house is enclosed in quadruplicate, as well as the original and six copies of PCP B-25, in the amount of \$5,000 as an estimate of furnishings for the Neilson House.

*I. J. Ellsworth*

I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In duplicate  
Enclosures

NORTHEAST REGION		Initial and Date
Reg. Director		
Asst. to RD(PA)		
Program Coord.		
Asst. Reg. Dir-Adm		
Finance & Prop.		
Personnel		
Safety		
Asst. Reg. Dir-En		
History & Arch.		N 10-4
Natural History		
Oper. & Maint.		
Ranger Services		
<i>Mas</i>	<i>HW</i>	9/27
Asst. Reg. Dir-Rp		
N. P. & Rec. Area Pl.		
Plan. Serv.		
Lands & Water		

*bound  
w/ original H. SR.  
8/8/63*



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

November 17, 1959

SARA 028  
CRBIB # 000826

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30-DCA

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
NOV 20 1959		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REG. DIRECTOR		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ASST. REG.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPERATIONS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INTERPRETATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> ADM.		
<input type="checkbox"/> REC. RES. PLAN.		
<input type="checkbox"/> RANGER ACT'S		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> History		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nat. Hist.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Archeol.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Publ.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Chief Architect

Subject: Revision No. 1, Historic Structures Report, Part I,  
Neilson House, Saratoga

The Revision No. 1, Historic Structures Report, Part I, Neilson House, Saratoga National Historical Park, which revises the interior finish of the house from plaster to the earlier finish of whitewashed brick nogging has been reviewed by the interested Divisions in the Washington Office and is recommended for approval.

We concur with Architect Judd's recommendation that the chimney be covered with weatherboarding as detailed on sheet 3 of the HABS record drawings. It is presumed that this item is not included in Revision No. 1.

*Dick Sutton*  
Dick Sutton  
Chief Architect

Copy to: Chief, EODC (2)  
Supt., Saratoga

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Lands		
	Engineer		
	Architect		
	Land Archt		
	Programs		

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

H 30

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

November 5, 1959

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Saratoga NHP

Subject: Revision No. 1, Historic Structures Report, Part 1,  
Neilson House

A review of memoranda constituting the subject revision  
has been made as suggested in your memorandum of November 3 to the  
Director, a copy of which was received here today.

Subject to the recommendation of the Director, approval of  
the undersigned may be indicated on the approval sheet.

*I. J. Ellsworth*

I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In duplicate

cc: Director (2)  
Chief, EODC (2)

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
NOVG - 1959		
✓ REG. DIRECTOR		11/16
✓ ASST. REG. DIR.		11/17
✓ OPERATIONS		11/19
✓ INTERPRETATION		11/19
ADM.		
REC RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACT'S		
History		
Not Recd		
Arch.		
Pub		
Misc.		
Sec.		

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Land's		
	Eng.		
✓	Arch.		RM 11/24
	Land		
✓	Progr.		Chas 11/23/59

Region Five  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

November 16, 1959

*Nelligan*  
*11/16*

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

From: Regional Director

Subject: Revision No. 1, Historic Structures Report, Part I,  
Neilson House

This office concurs with the change in the interior finish of the Neilson House as proposed.

After carefully reviewing Park Historian Luzader's presentation regarding the chimney, Architect Judd's memorandum of October 27, and Architect Gjessing's recommendations, we agree that the outside face of the chimney should be covered by the weatherboarding.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

Daniel J. Tobin  
Regional Director

In duplicate

Copy to: Director  
Chief, EODC

MHNelligan/cp  
General  
Daily  
Area  
Operations Division

Historic Structures Rpt - REVISION NO. 1  
Neilson House - Saratoga

11/3

INTERPRETATION

11/9

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	History	8/2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nat. His.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Archaeol.	11/4/59
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Publ.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Museum	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sec'y.	
<del>Neilson (Saratoga)</del>		

OPERATIONS

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Inds		
	Land		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Archit		11/10/59
	Land and Archit programs		

ASST. REGIONAL DIRECTOR

*[Signature]* 11/10/59

REGIONAL DIRECTOR

*[Signature]* 11/12

COMMENTS DUE 11/13

Region Five  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

November 3, 1959

*Nelly*  
*11/3*

Memorandum

To: Director

From: Regional Director

Subject: Revision No. 1, Historic Structures Report, Part I,  
Neilson House, Saratoga NHP

Attached for your consideration is Revision No. 1 to the Historic Structures Report on the Neilson House, Saratoga. The revision is composed of memoranda from Superintendent Ellsworth dated October 16, from Park Historian Luzader, same date, and from Architect Judd dated October 27. These originated as memoranda and attachments thereto, but since the proposals represent somewhat conspicuous changes in the restoration of the Neilson House as approved by all offices concerned, these recommendations should properly follow the same procedures as the basic report.

Accordingly, we are distributing this revision to all offices concerned, with the request that it be reviewed by no later than November 13, 1959. EODC has already expressed its concurrence with Mr. Judd's recommendations (memorandum to Saratoga by Acting Chief R. R. DeSilets, October 28, 1959, copy attached); the comments of this office will follow shortly within the review period.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin  
(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

Daniel J. Tobin  
Regional Director

In duplicate

Attachments

Copy to: Supt., Saratoga, w/attachments  
Chief, EODC, w/attachments

MHNelligan/cp  
General ✓  
Daily  
Area  
Operations Division

Eastern Office  
Division of Design and Construction  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

October 28, 1959

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
OCT 28 1959		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REG. DIRECTOR	11/3
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ASST. REG. DIR.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	DEPT. CHIEF	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ADM.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REC. MGR.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	TRAINING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	RESEARCH	
<input type="checkbox"/>	OTHER	

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park  
From: Acting Chief, EODC  
Subject: Neilson House Restoration, Saratoga NHP

Attached is a copy of memorandum dated October 27, prepared by Architect Judd, which is self explanatory. We concur with Mr. Judd's comments and hope that you do.

(Sgd.) Eugene R. DeSilets  
Eugene R. DeSilets  
Acting Chief

Attachment

Copy to: Regional Director, Region Five w/attachment  
Mr. Gjessing w/attachment

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Lands		
	Engineer		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<del>Architect</del>		
	Lands & Programs		

RAC 10/30

Revision No. 1  
Historic Structures Report - Part I

Neilson House  
Saratoga National Historical Park

APPROVAL SHEET

Recommended:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief, EODC

Approved:

*Approved. See Supt's memo 11/5/59*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent

Revision No. 1

Historic Structures Report - Part I

on

Neilson House

Saratoga National Historical Park

October 1959

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

October 16, 1959

H 30

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
OCT 19 1959		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REG. DIRECTOR	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ASST. REG. DIR.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	OPERATIONS	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	INTERPRETATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ADM.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REC. RES. PLAN	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	RANGER ACT'S	
	History	
	Nat. Hist.	
	Archeo.	
	Publ.	
	Museum	
	Sec'y.	

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five  
From: Superintendent, Saratoga NHP  
Subject: Neilson House Restoration

In view of the attached memorandum from Park Historian Luzader summarizing his observations and those of Buildings Restoration Specialist Martin, who reported additional findings when preparing the Neilson House for moving, it is being suggested that Architect Judd review the plans for restoration in the light of these new findings.

The Neilson House was moved to its original location yesterday.

*I. J. Ellsworth*

I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In duplicate  
Attachment  
cc: Chief, EODC  
Mr. Judd

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

H 30

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

October 16, 1959

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

From: Park Historian

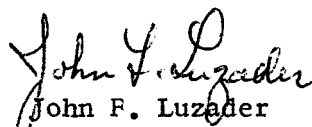
Subject: Neilson House Restoration

In the course of preparing the Neilson House for removal to its original location and for its structural restoration, it has been necessary for the Buildings Restoration Specialist to go into the house even more extensively than had been undertaken before. This has resulted in the exposure of some evidence which he brought to my attention. At first blush, this evidence would seem to bear directly upon the restoration of the building, raising questions concerning the historic appearance of the structure.

The first matter concerns the chimney. The drawings of the Architectural Data Section of the Historic Building Survey provides for the incorporation of the fireplace and chimney within the walls of the house, with the siding covering the rear of these features. The only facts related to the fireplace that are currently available have been obtained from the foundations, viz. rock protruded from the exterior face of the original foundation at the fireplace area, indicating the possibility of an fireplace whose rear wall extended outside the wall of the house. The existence of a raised plate adjacent to the fireplace area seems illogical in the light of a fireplace that lay within the interior of the house. These factors pose a question concerning the placement of the fireplace and flue (inside or outside the wall of the house.) It is possible that more evidence might be found around the ridge of the roof and the chimney well hole that will help resolve the placement of the fireplace and chimney.

The second matter concerns the interior finish of the house. As has been noted by Mr. Gjessing and by you in earlier memoranda, whitewash has been found on the brick nogging antedating the application of the plaster. Mr. Martin has noted the presence of whitewash on nogging in two bays, i.e., over the front door and to the right of the door leading to the lean-to. This does not reveal especially new information, but it has raised a question in Mr. Martin's mind, as well as in mine, concerning whether the house was plastered at the time of the battles, especially in view of the fact that John Neilson was absent from home

for four or five months of each year prior to the autumn of 1777.

  
John F. Luzader  
Park Historian

Supervising Architect, Historic Structures

October 27, 1959

Architect Judd, EODC

Neilson House Restoration, Saratoga National Historical Park

During my last visit to Saratoga National Historical Park, I reviewed the two items questioned by Park Historian Luzader in his memorandum dated October 16, 1959, and forwarded by copy of the Superintendent's memorandum to the Regional Director dated the same day.

The first matter concerned the chimney. Mr. Luzader feels that the outside face of the chimney at the fireplace level might be exposed to the weather with the weatherboarding butting to it from either side. This was sometimes done in that area but not as often as covering the masonry with weatherboarding. The framing of the Neilson House has been so altered at this point that it gives very little information in this matter. Above the fireplace level the framing gives definite indication that the upper stack was kept within the building. In referring back to the drawings and photographs in the survey report I can find no evidence to support any change in Mr. Gjessing's recommendations.

The second matter concerns the interior finish of the house. BRS Martin has removed more plaster from the house since Mr. Gjessing wrote his report. In two locations whitewash was found on the original brick nogging. Removing plaster would have a tendency to take away the whitewash so this was a rather lucky find. Whitewash evidently predated the plaster which in itself is very old and almost surely 18th century. I agree with Mr. Ellsworth and Mr. Luzader that we should use the evidence of the earlier finish and whitewash the brick nogging rather than plaster as first suggested. I have contacted a local brick manufacturer and find he can duplicate the unburned brick used in the original walls.

(SIGNED)

Henry A. Judd  
Architect

Copy to: Regional Director, Region Five -  
Superintendent, Saratoga NHP  
Mr. Gjessing, Virgin Islands NP

Info	OPERATIONS	Initial and Date
	Land's	
✓	Architect	HSC/4/9
	Land Archt Programs	✓ J. T. Scøyen

June 12, 1959

H30-DCR	
REGION FIVE	
JUN 15 1959	
✓	REG. DIRECTOR
✓	ASST. REG. DIR
✓	OPERATIONS
✓	INTERPRETING
	ADM.
	REC. MFG. PLAN
	RANGER AGTS
	H.I.

# Memorandum

To: Chief, Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction

From: Chief of Design and Construction

Subject: Working Drawing No. NHP-SAR-3057, Restoration of the John Neilson House, Saratoga National Historical Park

At plan review on June 11 with Associate Director Scøyen, plans for the restoration of the John Neilson House, Drawing No. NHP-SAR-3057 was approved. The record of approval signatures is as follows:

## Recommended

Edward S. Zimmer Chief, EODC	5/20/59
Ivan J. Ellsworth Superintendent, Saratoga	5/26/59
J. Carlisle Crouch Acting Regional Director	5/28/59
Merel S. Sager Acting Chief of Design and Construction	6/11/59

## Approved

E. T. Scøyen Acting Director	6/11/59
---------------------------------	---------

Thos. C. Vint, Chief of  
Design and Construction

In duplicate

Copy to: ✓ Regional Director, Region Five  
Supt., Saratoga

RECEIVED

MAY 18 1959

SARATOGA NATIONAL  
HISTORICAL PARK

Region Five  
421 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

May 15, 1959

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
MAY 22 1959		
REG. DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
✓ INTERPRETATION		
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN.		
RANGER ACT'S		

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

From: Regional Chief of Interpretation

Subject: Neilson House, Historic Structures Report

We have misplaced our copy of the Neilson House Part I Historic Structures Report. By chance, would you have an extra copy of the report or of the sections prepared by you and Historian Luzader? We would appreciate anything you can do to help us put another copy together.

Murray H. Neilligan  
Regional Chief of Interpretation

In duplicate

*Murray: — You may have our file copy, herewith. We have the text in the Neilson House Building Survey Report furnished by WODC.*

*Van*

Passarelli  
5/15/59Nelligan  
5/15

Region Five  
421 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

May 13, 1959

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park  
From: Regional Chief of Interpretation  
Subject: Neilson House, Historic Structures Report

We have misplaced our copy of the Neilson House Part I Historic Structures Report. By chance, would you have an extra copy of the report or of the sections prepared by you and Historian Luzader? We would appreciate anything you can do to help us put another copy together.

Signed

Murray H. Nelligan  
Regional Chief of Interpretation

In duplicate

cp

General  
Daily  
Area



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30-DCA

FEB 16 1959

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
FEB 17 1959		
REG. DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
INTERPRETATION		
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACT'S		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five  
Acting  
From: /Director

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Part I, Architectural  
Data Section, Neilson House, Saratoga

We have reviewed your memorandum of January 19 and the copy of memorandum of January 14 to you from Superintendent Ellsworth, Saratoga, concerning the reservations to his approval of the Historic Buildings Report, Part I, Architectural Data Section, Neilson House, Saratoga.

It is our opinion that the inclusion of the porch in the restoration would enhance the appearance of the building. The reconstruction of the porch is recommended in the architectural section of the report and has our concurrence.

We also concur in the recommendation to plaster the walls in the main room. The different types of brick nogging found in the structure, as noted in Superintendent Ellsworth's memorandum of January 14, could have been due to the stages of construction in which the brick nogging was built in.

We recommend that these two items be included in the final plans as alternates. The alternates could then be omitted from the contract if conclusive evidence is found before the contract award justifying their omission.

*Henry A. Tolson*  
Acting Director

Copy to: Chief, EODC (2)  
Supt., Saratoga

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Lands		
	Engineer		
	Architect		
	Land-Archit Programs		

Region Five  
421 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

January 19, 1959

*Nelligan*  
1/19

Memorandum

To: Director

From: Regional Director

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Part I, Architectural Data  
Section, Neilson House

Attached for your information is a copy of a memorandum from Superintendent Ellsworth, Saratoga, approving the subject report with two reservations concerning the question of the porch and the interior plastering. You may recall that in our memorandum of January 6, we suggested to Superintendent Ellsworth that he might wish to approve the Part I of the Survey Report with such reservations as he might wish to make, and that these could perhaps be worked out and decided upon on the basis of Part II of the report.

Unless more data is needed for the preparation of drawings than is in the Part I Architectural and Historical Sections, it seems to us that the Part II of the Survey Report might be limited to attempting to resolve the two questions set forth in Mr. Ellsworth's memorandum.

We would appreciate your opinion of this proposal.

(Sgd.) Daniel J. Tobin

Daniel J. Tobin  
Regional Director

In duplicate

Attachment

Copy to: Supt., Saratoga  
Chief, EODC, w/copy incoming memo  
Regional Chief of Operations

MHNelligan/cp

General✓  
Daily  
Area

H 30

Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

January 14, 1959

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
JAN 19 1959		
REG. DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
INVESTIGATION		
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN		
RANGER ACTS		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Part I, Architectural  
Data Section, Neilson House

In response to your memorandum of January 6 regarding approval of the subject report, this will constitute my approval subject to the following reservations:

1. Since substantial and conclusive evidence is still lacking as to the existence of a porch on the Neilson House at the time of the Battles of Saratoga, Drawing NHP-SAR-3057 designated PRELIMINARY (sic) might well be revised to eliminate the porch from the final plans until further research or more conclusive evidence establishes the period of porch construction.
2. Because of the wide divergence of opinion as to when the house was plastered, or even when the brick nogging was installed, elimination of nogging and plastering from the final construction plan is suggested. This may be justified from the evidence that the interior of the house may have been whitewashed prior to installation of the nogging, and the fact that the nogging brick is different types and must have been secured from different sources and may have been inserted over a period of time.

From the evidence presented in the report and in memoranda of comment there are so many alternatives that may be drawn from findings that it seems very difficult to draw a conclusion except in favor of the most primitive solution.

(Sgt) I. J. ELLSWORTH

I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In triplicate  
Copy to: Director  
Chief, EODC  
Note to Regional Director: This is your triplicate copy to indicate  
copies sent to the Director and Chief, EODC

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

H 30

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

January 14, 1959

REGION FIVE	INITIAL AND DATE
JAN 16 1959	
✓ REGIONAL DIRECTOR	1/19
✓ ASST. DIR.	1/20
✓ OPERATIONS	1/19
✓ SUPERVISOR	
✓ ADM.	
✓ REC. RES. PLAN	
✓ RANGER RECORDS	
✓ Hqs. J.	
✓ [Signature]	

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Part I, Architectural  
Data Section, Neilson House

In response to your memorandum of January 6 regarding approval of the subject report, this will constitute my approval subject to the following reservations:

1. Since substantial and conclusive evidence is still lacking as to the existence of a porch on the Neilson House at the time of the Battles of Saratoga, Drawing NHP-SAR-3057 designated PRELIMINARY (sic) might well be revised to eliminate the porch from the final plans until further research or more conclusive evidence establishes the period of porch construction.

2. Because of the wide divergence of opinion as to when the house was plastered, or even when the brick nogging was installed, elimination of nogging and plastering from the final construction plan is suggested. This may be justified from the evidence that the interior of the house may have been whitewashed prior to installation of the nogging, and the fact that the nogging brick is of different types and must have been secured from different sources and may have been inserted over a period of time.

From the evidence presented in the report and in memoranda of comment there are so many alternatives that may be drawn from findings that it seems very difficult to draw a conclusion except in favor of the most primitive solution.

*I. J. Ellsworth*  
I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

In duplicate

to	OPERATIONS	Initial and Date
	Lands	
	Engineer	
	Architect	
	Land	
	Program	

*Welsch* *11/10*

Eastern Office  
Division of Design and Construction  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

November 6, 1958

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
NOV 7 1958		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REG. DIRECTOR		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ASST. REG. DIR.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPERATIONS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INTERPRETATION		
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN.		
RANGER ACT'S		

*11/10*  
*11/17*

# Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

From: Acting Chief, EODC

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Architectural Data Section,  
Neilson House, Saratoga NHP

Reference is made to Superintendent Ellsworth's memorandum to the Regional Director dated October 17.

We asked Architect Judd, in the absence of Architect Gjessing who has returned to the Virgin Islands, to comment on the questions raised by Mr. Luzader and concurred by you, as to the existence of a front porch and the plaster finish on the walls at the time of the Battle of Saratoga. A copy of Mr. Judd's memorandum of October 28, fortifying Mr. Gjessing's report in regard to these two points, is attached herewith for your consideration.

Mr. Judd points out what seems to us to be conclusive evidence that the porch framing was erected at the time of the original construction of the house. The number of porch posts is conjectural.

The question as to whether the interior walls remained unplastered until after the battle remains a matter of debate. But the absence of any evidence of whitewash on the brick nogging beneath the plaster would seem to indicate that the nogging had not remained exposed for any appreciable period of time. It would therefore not seem probable that this unfinished condition of the walls would have existed at the time of the battle, which occurred some two years after the erection of the house.

We endorse the expressed hope that this restored building retain the primitive character of a frontier farmhouse.

Harvey H. Cornell  
Harvey H. Cornell  
Acting Chief

Attachment

Copy to: Chief of D & C w/attachment  
Regional Director, Region Five w/attachment --  
Mr. Judd, Schuylerville, N. Y.  
Mr. Gjessing, Virgin Islands NP

130  
28 25  
204

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park  
Appomattox, Virginia

October 26, 1936

Memorandum

To:           Supervising Architect, Historic Structures

From:          Architect Judd

Subject:       Historic Buildings Report, Architectural Data Section,  
              Hulston House, Saratoga National Historical Park

I have your memorandum of October 23rd with the attached copies of Superintendent Kilworth's memorandum and Historic Landmark's memorandum, both dated October 17. I will try to answer the questions asked without bothering Architect Gleasing; however, since he made the study of the house his remarks would be welcome.

The rafter nests (or beds) cut into the front plate and the mortises in the studs directly below were clearly for rafters and joints of a porch. Both the nests and mortises appear to be part of the original framing for the house and would have been rather difficult to have been installed in that manner at a later date. This porch had five rafters and five joints (see Drawing 2, Perspective Framing Diagram). It may have had five columns or posts as well, however, this is far more than necessary to support the span. Leasing's sketch (Illustration 1) shows five posts while later photographs show only four (Illustrations 3 and 4). Mr. Gleasing and I discussed this problem at some length and decided four posts most logical. It would be normal to replace a post as it rotted and thereby maintain the original number of posts throughout the years. This reasoning is conjectural and could well be wrong. We do feel that the photographs are far more dependable than Leasing, who is wrong in many other details. Illustrations of the Schuyler House differ greatly in his "Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution" and his "The House from the Wilderness to the Sea". Neither of these are accurate. I have little faith in the accuracy of Leasing's sketches just as many others have little faith in his writings.

In 1777 only the walls of the house would have been plastered. The ceiling at that time would have been the underside of the floor above. Whitcomb on the joists and floor boards give evidence of this. Illustration 25 of the report shows remains of this early plaster just under the floor boards above and above the line of

a later and lower plastered surface. This early plaster was applied directly to the masonry without the benefit of lath and is the earliest finish we have found evidence of. In the kitchen kitchen evidence of whitewash beneath the plaster is quite clear and distinct, while no such evidence is to be found in the main house. It would be hard to believe that the raw masonry of red dried brick was left exposed without either plaster or whitewash, while lime was being burned for the masonry in the foundation or chimney, it would have been logical to have burned lime for the plaster. The other materials for the plaster, namely clay and animal hair, would have been reasonably easy to acquire. The actual job of applying plaster to the sidewalls of this one room would have taken one man less than a day.

No lath, split or sawn, was used in the house for many years after the historic period and most probably not until the additions of the early 19th century. Architect Judd explains this on page 10 and 11 of the report. It would be a mistake to have any lath of any kind show in the restoration.

Henry A. Judd  
Architect

Copy to: Architect Frederik G. Jørgensen,  
Virgin Islands National Park

Region Five  
421 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

October 23, 1958

Nelligan  
10/23

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park  
From: Acting Regional Director  
Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Architectural Data Section,  
Neilson House

The subject report has been reviewed by this office and we are pleased to recommend its approval.

Architect Gjessing is to be complimented on his presentation, also Park Historian Luzader. A copy of the latter's comments on the report and yours are being forwarded to the Washington Office.

(Sgd) J. Carlisle Crouch

J. Carlisle Crouch  
Acting Regional Director

In duplicate

Copy to: Director/with copy comments  
Chief, EODC  
Operations Division

MHNelligan/cp

General  
Daily  
Area



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H30-D

October 21, 1958

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
OCT 23 1958		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REG. DIRECTOR		11/1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ASST. REG. DIR.		11/1
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPERATIONS		11/2
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INTERPRETATION		10/23
<input type="checkbox"/> ADM.		
<input type="checkbox"/> REC. RES. PLAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> RANGER ACTS		
<i>Oct.</i>		
<i>7 gm 10/28</i>		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Chief of Design and Construction

Subject: Historic Buildings Survey Report of the Neilson House,  
Saratoga National Historical Park

The Architectural Data Section of subject report submitted with your memorandum of October 10 was reviewed by the interested Divisions in the Washington Office, and is recommended for acceptance and approval.

We appreciate very much the completeness of this report as prepared by Mr. Gjessing, with historical data by Mr. Luzador. The completed HABS drawings of this structure will be a splendid contribution to the collection in the Library of Congress.

*Thos. C. Vint*  
Thos. C. Vint, Chief of  
Design and Construction

Copy to: Chief, EODC (2)  
Supt., Saratoga

Info	OPERATIONS	Act	Initial and Date
	Lands		
	Engineer		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Architect		<i>DBL 10/28</i>
	Land Archt		<i>7 gm 10/28</i>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Programs		<i>10/27</i>
	<i>Dutton</i>		<i>10/26</i>

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

H 30

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

October 17, 1958

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
OCT 20 1958		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REG. DIRECTOR		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ASST. REG. DIR.		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OPERATIONS		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INTERPRETATION		
<input type="checkbox"/> ADM.		
<input type="checkbox"/> REC. RES. PLAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> RANGER ACT'S		

*125 125.10/2)*

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park

Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Architectural Data Section,  
Neilson House

Attached is the signed ribbon copy of Mr. Palmer's memorandum of October 10 received as a transmittal memorandum for the subject report. It seems that the copies of the memoranda and reports became reversed in enveloping, so to avoid later uncertainty it was decided to inform you as to the distribution.

Park Historian Luzader has made a careful analysis of the report. His comment is attached.

Mr. Gjessing is to be complimented on the completeness of his report and the excellent presentation. He has recognized the uniqueness of the house, since it appears to have been built by a pioneer farmer, probably assisted by neighbors, as was customary in those days. As no similar structures are known comparison with larger and more elaborate houses had little value. Some of the split lath fashioned from split lathing boards (rather than sawn boards) found in the house is very rare in this locality and probably elsewhere. It would be well to have some of this lath replaced and left exposed as an unusual interest item, provided of course that the main room is replastered.

A number of deductions drawn from the investigation have alternate possibilities which might have been stated. I share Mr. Luzader's doubts that the plastering of the walls had been completed by the fall of 1777.

It is not clear from Mr. Gjessing's language, "other exposed surfaces of walls and ceilings the plaster appeared generally to be of an early date and to be uniformly of a lime, fine sand and hair mix", that a goodly portion of this area was plastered in 1951, including all of the west wall and a portion of the south wall.

It also appears that the evidence regarding the existence of a porch on the Neilson House at the period of historic significance is inconclusive. The first indication of the house having a porch is illustrated in Lossing's sketch of 1848. This might have been added many years after the house was built. It appears from Lossing's sketch that the porch on the original

house had 5 columns, or more probably 4 columns and a pilaster if the porch was built at the same time as the addition, or the 5th column or pilaster (hidden in the sketch behind the addition) may have been omitted at the attachment to the addition. I believe the existence of a porch should be given more study. Then, should it be determined that the house had a porch originally, it is suggested that the south elevation, architecturally incorrect as shown on NHP-SAR-3057, be revised to incorporate the 5 column spacing detailed in Lossing's sketch. This would allow columns to be removed from in front of the door and window. It will be noted that Lossing shows the same architectural detail on the porch of the original house as on the addition. This, of course, is not conclusive evidence that both were constructed at the same time, but is supporting.

In conclusion, I believe Mr. Luzader's comment is well founded and should be given considerable weight in your review. I concur in his views, especially with respect to the preservation of the primitive characteristics of appearance, construction elements and finish.



I. J. Ellsworth  
Superintendent

Copy to: Chief EODC (2)  
Attachment

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

H 30

Saratoga National Historical Park  
Stillwater, New York

October 17, 1958

Memorandum

To: Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park  
From: Park Historian  
Subject: Historic Buildings Report, Architectural Data Section,  
Neilson House

Except for a mistake in the date of Federal Acquisition and in locating the historic house south rather than north of the modern building in 1926 (page 3, par. 3, line 7), the report seems well and carefully prepared.

The discussion of the internal architectural evidence is presented clearly and is comprehensive enough for the purposes to be served.

I do have some doubts that Neilson had plastered the interior prior to the autumn of 1777, as Mr. Gjessing seems to believe. (see page 19) If he did, he was a very busy man and fast worker. Besides farming, he saw several weeks of duty with the militia during 1776 and 1777. If, as seems probable, he built the house during the summer of 1775, he probably did not get around to plastering it by the end of 1777. It seems more likely to me that the noggin was exposed at the time of the battles, the historic period toward which the restoration is aimed.

While it is clear that the building had a porch in 1848, I wonder whether the evidence is conclusive that it was there at the time of the battles; or was it a later addition? Were porches common to structures of this type and in this area at that time? I don't know. However, I know of no other house in this part of the country of that date and type that has a porch. Of course, such houses are precious few.

Having viewed the beginning of the archeological examination with a degree of scepticism, I followed that phase of the research with considerable interest. The discovery of old footings south of these uncovered in 1957 established the existence of early construction at that site. The mortar, nails, 18th century spoon, and earthen inkwell, as well as other indications of long occupation indicated that the site was used early and long. The photographic sources substantiated the evidence uncovered, and the locating of the cellar hole of the post-war house seemed to tie the location of the

historic house to the newly uncovered foundations. It seems that Mr. Gjessing's interpretation concerning these features is valid.

I hope that the atmosphere of a frontier farm home will not be lost in the restoration, that the primitive character of the house will be recreated, and that the house's integrity will be enhanced rather than compromised.

*John F. Luzader*  
John F. Luzader  
Park Historian

ROUTING SHEET

10/10/58

Saratoga

Historic Buildings Report - Neilson House  
Architectural Data

Interpretation

*JC*  
Coffey

*A very fine piece of work.*

*B*  
Barnes

*An excellent piece of analysis (Luzader did cite two of the photos in his report, but Gressing was more persistent in tracking down such evidence, and brought WILLCO's the eye of an architect to bear)*

*Any devices or building techniques for the new restoration which will inhibit wide fluctuations in temp. & humidity will be very beneficial for the objects on display*

*Architect*

*10/21/58*

*Katymate noted as being the*

*Programs (note especially estimate of 1751)*  
Assistant Regional Director

*OK*  
Regional Director

*Return 11/3*

*Presently available 4,250!*

~~Dr. Neilligan (last)~~

Comments due no later than Oct. 20, 1958

Region Five  
421 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

October 10, 1958

*JLCotter*  
*10/10/58*

Memorandum

To: Director

From: Acting Regional Director

Subject: Historic Buildings Report - Architectural Data Section -  
Neilson House, Saratoga National Historical Park

In accordance with the procedure outlined in FO-11-56 dated February 16, 1956, attached for your consideration is the Architectural Data Section of the Historic Buildings Report for the Neilson House, prepared by Architect Gjessing. By copy of this memorandum, we are forwarding a copy of the report to the Superintendent for review and comment.

The report should be reviewed by no later than October 20, 1958.

George A. Palmer  
Acting Regional Director

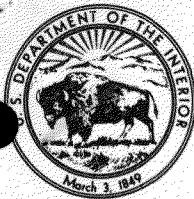
In duplicate

Attachment

Copy to: Supt., Saratoga, w/c report  
Chief, EODC  
Operations Division

JLCotter/cp

General ✓  
Daily  
Area



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Eastern Office  
Division of Design and Construction  
Philadelphia 6, Pa.

October 10, 1958

H30  
IN REPLY REFER TO:

H2623

REGION FIVE		INITIAL AND DATE
OCT 10 1958		
REG. DIRECTOR		
ASST. REG. DIR.		
OPERATIONS		
✓ INTERPRETATION		OK 10/23
ADM.		
REC. RES. PLAN.		
RANGER ACT'S		

Memorandum

To: Regional Director, Region Five

From: Chief, EODC

Subject: Neilson House, Saratoga National Historical Park

Attached are three copies of Architect Gjessing's report on existing conditions and with a proposed design for restoring the Neilson House. This is the architectural part of the "Historic Buildings Report."

Restoration would include the moving of the structure back to the original site, reconstruction of the front porch, replacement and repairing of numerous small parts and painting the exterior of the house red. The principal features of this report have been discussed with you and your staff in advance. We hope you will find it satisfactory and that early approvals can be obtained. Historical research provided very little information for the plans in this report. Fortunately, evidence for nearly all details was found in the structure itself. ✓

We would like to rebuild the foundations on the original site by force account and move the old frame onto it as soon as possible. While the present siding will be largely replaced, we would like to keep it on during the moving, to help hold the house together. The moving can be done by contract; Mr. Judd advises that there are competent bidders for this type of work in the area. The structure ought to be completely enclosed before winter sets in so that work can continue inside.

Among other things, please note that the estimate includes a large item for an underground electric cable and will require supplemental funds to complete the job. The details of heating

will be the subject of a later memorandum.

*Edward S. Zimmer*  
Edward S. Zimmer  
Chief

Attachments 3

Copy to: Chief of D & C  
Superintendent, Saratoga NHP  
Mr. Gjessing, Virgin Islands NP w/copy of report  
Mr. Judd, Lynchburg, Va., w/copy of report



Region 1  
All United States  
National Historic  
Landmarks

March 11, 1954

Memorandum

Subject

From Regional Director

Re: Billings, Montana National Historical Park  
Historic Building Reports, Part I

Attached for your comment and recommendation are

a revised administrative data section, architectural data  
section and archaeological data section of Part I, Historic  
Building Reports, Billings, Montana. These sections should be  
submitted by the end of April.

The contents of this office will be submitted within

the office period.

Walter J. Tamm  
Regional Director

cc: duplicate

cc: telephone

cc: Billings, Montana (with attachments)  
Chief, BLM (with attachments)

CPassat-111

General  
Daily  
Area

Report on the  
Historical Survey  
of the  
National Park

August 11, 1937

Memorandum

Subject: National Park Service, National Historical Park

Regional History

Report: Historical Survey of the National Historical Park

Part I of the subject report was received and forwarded by this office for review and comment by memorandum dated July 14, 1937.

Our comments on this report are as follows:

In general, the report has been extremely well prepared. However, it does not give a clear-cut picture of the physical history (if such is available) of the structure, nor is it precise as to exactly what is proposed to be done to the structure. In illustration: The History section of the report very satisfactorily establishes the authenticity of the Nelson House, and clearly states what was proposed for the structure. Likewise, the Archaeological, Landscape and Surroundings sections are reasonably explicit as to the present situation and what changes are proposed, if any. But there is no specific description of the historic appearance of the house in the Historical section, and there is no architectural section where such a description might also logically have been placed, together with a statement as to what work is to be done and changes made, either in the structure or its location. The Historical section might also have included a statement as to whether or not the State of New York had been explored for records of the removal of the building to its present location.

The Administrative section, we note, does not give a definite historic period to which the house is to be restored and interpreted (although the History section does give the target date 1777).

More important, this section fails to say just what is proposed to be done with the structure; here a clear-cut, definite statement regarding changes to be made in the structure, whether or not it is to be removed to its original site, etc. would be desirable.

Accordingly, we recommend that this project be deferred until:

1. The Administrative Section of the report has been revised to state more explicitly what work, such as the site plan, etc. are contemplated, in line with the above comments.

2. That an historic period be included in the Administrative Section.

3. That a concise description of the structure be included in the Architectural Section.

4. That the New York State Archives be explored for records of the moving of the building by the State to its present location (or if this has already been done, it be so noted).

5. That the original site be explored archaeologically for whatever information it may reveal concerning the structure.

This office will be happy to assist in revising the report and in accomplishing the necessary archaeology.

Benjamin J. Tobin  
Regional Director

In duplicate

Copy to: Director  
Chief, NDC

M'Donnell/cp

General  
Daily  
Arce



HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY

JOHN NEILSON HOUSE

Revision of Administrative Data

September 3, 1957

The John Neilson House is to be restored to the historic period of September and October, 1777, the time during which the house was a part of the American camp. In order to accomplish this, the building should be relocated on its original site, the present planed siding should be removed and replaced with sawn weather boarding, and the interior should be either stabilized or restored.

Before the structure is to be restored to the historic period the following should be accomplished: (1) an archeological examination of the original site should be undertaken for the purpose of obtaining whatever information concerning the structure might be discovered; (2) an architectural examination of the house should be made to determine, if possible, what portions of the interior and exterior are original in order to fix the amount of restoration and/or stabilization that will be required.

The John Neilson House will be presented as a historic house exhibit illustrative of the home of an 18th century frontier farmer. It will be integrated into the interpretive program of Saratoga National Historical Park through its incorporation, along with its environs, into the reconstructed American lines, as recommended in the Landscape Section of this report. The story of the structure's role in the Battles of Saratoga will be related through the media of park literature, trailside exhibits, and interpretive signs.

## HISTORICAL DATA

Prepared by John F. Luzader, Park Historian

May 22, 1957

The objective of this report is to consolidate all of the material that has been located and studied relating to the John Neilson House at Saratoga National Historical Park. The purpose of this research is to assist in the restoration of the house and to provide a factual background for the interpretation of the structure as a part of the Battles of Saratoga.

This report is prepared in accordance with a memorandum from Regional Director, Daniel J. Tobin for the Superintendent, Saratoga National Historical Park, dated December 13, 1957, requesting a documentary report on the John Neilson House for the purpose of consolidating the available information concerning the historical significance and appearance of this structure.

The Historical Significance of the John Neilson House. The John Neilson House derives its historic importance from the role that the home and the adjacent farm played in the Battles of Saratoga, September 19 and October 7, 1777. As the site of a part of the western portion of the American lines and as the traditional quarters for some of the American Officers, the Neilson homestead and its story is an integral part of the story of Saratoga. Thus the historic period, for the purposes of restoration and interpretation, is limited to the year, 1777.

John Neilson was born in the vicinity of Elizabeth, New Jersey on March 23, 1753. His parents were Samuel Neilson or Nelson, a native of England, and Mary Courtenay, a native of Dublin, who, according to family tradition, was a cousin to Lord Courtenay.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Neilson, Charles, An Original Compiled and Corrected Account of Burgoyne's Campaign and the Memorable Battles of Bemis Heights September 19 and Oct. 7, 1777, From the Most Authentic Sources and Information Including Many Interesting Incidents connected With the Same, J. Munsell, Albany, 1844, p. 277.

Family tradition tells that on his nineteenth birthday young John Neilson left his home and family and traveled up the Hudson River until he came to within about one mile of Bemis Heights, when he entered into the employe of Abner Quitterfield, whose daughter, Lydia, he married in 1775.<sup>2</sup>

About the time of his marriage he established himself on the hill above a Jotham Bemis's tavern, already known as Bemis's Heights. As time passed he secured farm lands including Lots 13, 14, and 15 of the old Saratoga Patent.<sup>3</sup> While he was thus a farmer of substantial holdings, his primary interest seems to have been lumber, which he contracted for and floated down the Hudson to Albany. By the time of his death in 1834 he was a very prosperous landowner and businessman, as is reflected in his tax receipts for the year 1814<sup>4</sup>, owning lands in Malta, Northumberland, Stillwater Townships and the island at Fort Edward.

According to his own account, John Neilson's military service began with his enrollment in Colonel John McCrae's Regiment of the New York Militia. His account of his service, probably typical of other militiamen's military service, reads:

"Colonel John M. Crays Regiment

Various Services done by me in the militia in the Revolutionary War. We first went to Tyconderoga when Allen took the fort Capt Ebenezer Marvin Company.

We next went to Johnstown when Sir John

John Johnson attempted to defend himself at the hall - Capt. Alexander Baldwin

At Balston and Milton when Sir John Johnson came down and burnt the houses and general gordon (?) and several other prisoners and went with Governor Clinton to Crowpoint to cut off Sir John's Return - Capt. Job Wright.

---

2. Ibid., pp. 278-79.

3. The Neilson Papers, Saratoga N. H. P., Envelope 1

4. Ibid., Envelope 5

"To Fort edw / Fort Edward / and Fort George when the fort Ann and fort George was Burnt and helped to bury the men that was mascreed at (Gages?) hill helped to cary 19 to their graves that was tomihawked and I helped at fort edward when General Tenbrocks (Ten Broeck) built the log Breastwork on the hill-----and at Fortedward at several other times in the militia.....  
 at palmerstown at an alarm under Capt Van Vort.....  
 at the same place when Daniel Parks and his son was killed by Tories-----  
 and at the same place at a number of other times  
 once at Palmer town by a substitute a Son of Ronlin(?) Perry which I paid fifty dollars to for doing a fortnite duty for me When money was at about 2 or 3 for one  
 I went once by substitute for 9 months I doe not Remember but two with me in the class that hiered him I got my certificate of his being excepted for the nine months from Capt Job Wright. I think his name was Jacob Brower and he immediately - enlisted in to Capt Riter Company for two years-----  
 Some other Substitutes I helped to imply who I have for got their names-----  
 I have bin to Saratoga and to Argule (Argyle) and to different parts of the District Where I belong a number of times.  
 I alway belonged within the boundary of Capt Ephraim Wood company Except in the time wen I Retreted from Borgeyne army. I served as a Serjent with very little Exception during the Whole of the War."5

In another account he describes his service as follows:

"Colonel John McCrays Regement

The private duty done by John Neilson in the Revolutionary War under the following officers

Capt - Ebenezer - Marvin

Capt - Alexander - Baldwin

Capt - Ephraim - Woodworth

Capt - Peter Van - Vort

Capt - Job Wright

Lieutenant Benjamin - Ger (?)

a number of other officers Which I have for got the time of actual service out in military Service by myself by Substitutes one year and four months I served as a Serjent in Capt Ephraim Woodworths Company With a very little Exception through the War and principally as sutch while acting in Other Companys I remained in the Bounds of Capt Woodworths Company through the war my time with a team of four oxen and a cart was employed the first two years of the Revolutionary war in carying provition and Baggage and military Stores from Albany to Lake George and a part in drawing timber a part of the time part in the Service about four months and a half in Each year.

"the next year I was (?) about three months in cart from Albany or before in carry carryin (sic) provition and other militajarye Stores.

I was (?) on or about the 1 or 2 day of Sept on Van-Schanks (Schaicks) iseland by one of General Gates officers to take baggage and went to Stillwater and Remained With the army until Burgoynes army was taken and my team carried the Bags to Albany after the army went down and I did not get home with my team untill the twenty forth or the twenty fifth of November Which was about three months."<sup>6</sup>

An interesting glimpse into Revolutionary military history can be had by noting that among his duties as a "Serjent" in the militia was the execution of disciplinary action against militiamen who failed to present themselves at the proper time and place, and were thus AWOL. One such delinquent, John McCarty failed to attend to his duty at Fort Edward and was ordered to pay a forfeiture of ten pounds and Sergeant Neilson was directed to levy on McCarty's goods and chattels to that amount plus costs. Similar action was taken against Abraham Beets, Isaac Montrose and Neilson's neighbor, the tavern-keeper Jotham Bemis.<sup>7</sup> The records do not reveal what effect this had upon the neighbor's relations. Neilson's military connections did not entirely cease after the Revolution for he was commissioned an ensign in Captain John Vernon's Company of the Albany County Militia on 17 October 1786. After Saratoga County was formed by the partition of Albany John Neilson was commissioned the captain of a company of light infantry in the new county's militia regiment.<sup>8</sup>

Family tradition, reflected in Charles's Neilson Book, tells that after the American came to Stillwater and began to construct fortifications, John Neilson and other local men persuaded General Gates

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6. Ibid

7. Ibid., Envelope III.

8. 1. Ensign's Commission, John Nelson, 17 October 1786, Ibid., IV

2. Captain's Commission, John Neilson, 9 May 1792, Ibid., V

that more strategic location, with the hills very close to the river forming a narrow defile through which the road from the north to Albany passed, was located at Bemis Heights.<sup>9</sup> The commander then moved to the new position which included Neilson's farm, and thus the decisive action occurred on a site chosen at the suggestion of the young farmer. While there is no other authority for this account, it may be true that Gates did act upon this local information for he was no incompetent unable to accept local advice. His experience while under Braddock's command had taught that whatever the facts were he did abandon Stillwater because of its terrain and moved to the hills above Bemis's Tavern.

After the War Neilson prospered, bought more land, collected money for the poor fund, gave land for the new highway, contributed to the construction of the "Meeting-house" at Stillwater, and was a subscriber to the Stillwater Public Library.<sup>10</sup> He died in 1834 and was buried in the Stillwater Cemetery.

#### The Neilson Farm in 1777

About 1774 or 1775 John Neilson began the purchase of a tract of land on the hill above the Bemis Tavern which he cleared and where he erected a log cabin to which he brought his bride in 1773.

Within a short time after the Neilsons' marriage their lives, like those of their neighbors, were altered by the outbreak of the Revolution. The militia was "called up" in response to alarms and eventually to participate in the action against Ticonderoga. Young Neilson's time was divided between his farming and his military duties, and the domestic

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9. Neilson, op. cit., p. 114.

10. Neilson Papers, Envelopes VI, VII, VIII.

life of his newly established home was naturally effected. While his absences and divided attentions were disruptive enough, the course of the war was to result in even greater hardship for the young people and their neighbors. The Indian allies of Britain became a threat that terrified the northern frontier. It is difficult for us of the 20th Century to appreciate the horror that the people of the frontier had of Indian warfare. Stories of Indian massacres and atrocities were a part of every American's heritage. Most of American history was a compound of Indian wars and solitary attacks. Nearly every person who did not live in very oldest parts of the Colonies had personal knowledge in one degree or another of some instance of Indian outrage. The fear of Indian hostilities was never far from anyone's thoughts, and parents, filled with apprehension of murders or captures, were constantly alarmed that their homes would be exposed to violence.

When Burgoyne launched his invasion, accompanied by his Indian allies, the whole country-side was panic-stricken. It was more the fear of the red man than of the British Army that sent refugees streaming south toward Albany with each advance of the English. The death of Jane McCrae and the Allen Family in the Fort Edward-Argyle region threw fresh fear into colonial hearts. Loyalists and Indians were the hated and feared foes from whom the settler expected the most inhuman treatment.

The Revolutionary War really came to the Neilson farm in the form of a guerilla attack, which Neilson describes as follows:

"My step-grandfather, who had been very active among the Indians and Tories, and understood their manner of warfare so well, that he was often selected to head volunteer parties, who went in pursuit of them, in their marauding expeditions and was generally very successful; for which they owed him a grudge, and tried manyways to decoy and take him; but he had always eluded them.

"It happened on a time when it was supposed there were no Indians in the vicinity, and the inhabitants all felt secure, that my father was gone from home on business with the committee of safety, leaving my grandfather, grandmother, and mother at home alone - they all occupying the same house at the time. Soon after dark, a little dog which they had, and which was then in the house, for some moments seemed to express considerable uneasiness, and at last came to the door, and with a kind of howl or unusual expression, immediately turned and looked up, with such seeming concern, to my grandfather, whose keen perception in a moment led him to exclaim, "Indians!" He immediately caught his rifle, which lay horizontally on hooks attached to a beam overhead, and opening the door stepped out, but he had no sooner passed the threshold, than the sharp crack of three rifles were heard in rapid succession and he staggered back, exclaiming, "Run for your lives!" and fell into the room. My mother and grandmother, already horror-stricken, gave a sudden scream and immediately sprang out of an opposite window, and ran to a neighboring house, about eighty rods distant, to give the alarm. It so happened that two distant neighbors, who had been out that day on a hunting excursion, called at the same house some ten or fifteen minutes before, and hearing the firing, were in company with the occupant, listening to ascertain its direction, if repeated. At the same time a horse was heard at a distance rapidly approaching, which soon proved to be my father's, on which, having heard the firing, and suspecting mischief, he was riding at the top of his speed, and arrived at the moment the alarm was given. Springing from his horse, and being furnished with a rifle, the four men immediately hurried on, regardless of any danger they might be rushing into. On approaching the house, it being then quite dark, they caught the glimpse of persons running in the direction of a piece of woods near by; upon whom they, in their hurry, fired at random.

"Having pursued on to the skirt of the wood, and seeing no more of the enemy, they returned to the house, where a mournful spectacle presented itself. There lay the mangled and lifeless corpse of my grandfather, drenched in his own blood, and tomahawked and scalped; and on examination it was found that three balls had passed through his body."<sup>11</sup>

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11. Neilson, op. cit., pp. 32-34.

With the movement of the American Army to Bemis Heights on September 12, 1777, the Neilson farm assumed military significance. On that day Richard Varick, then serving as General Arnold's aid-de-camp, wrote to his old commander and close friend, Philip Schuyler:

"Camp near Hd. Qurs.  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile  
West of Bemis's  
August <sup>[sic]</sup> Sept. 7 12, 1777.  
2 oclock

You will observe our Camp is removed from Still Water..... Upon this, the Army struck their Tents at Day Light & were encamped here by 10 OClock.....As you are no doubt very well acquainted with the Situation of the Ground I shall forbear saying anything further on that Head, than that we occupy it from the Heights near <sup>[sic]</sup> Bemis's to the Summit at a north of the Read House where Head Quarters now is. Genl Arnold is on the highest part of the Hill at the house on the Road about North from Head Qurs as also Genl. poor's.....On Opposite Side I shall by pencil give you a faint description of our Encampment."<sup>12</sup>

While contemporary accounts do not mention the Neilson House, the maps of the American fortifications clearly indicate that the entrenchments ran in a northwestern direction from behind Bemis's Tavern to the top of the hill and then turned southwest, presenting a convex front toward the enemy in the north, comprehending the Neilson House and farm yard which constituted lot number 14 of the Stillwater section of the Saratoga Patent.<sup>13</sup>

Soon after the close of the Burgoyne Campaign, Neilson made a claim for reimbursement for damages incurred during the time of the American occupation of Bemis Heights. An appraisal was made during the next spring and the following report submitted:

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12. The Schuyler Papers, New York Public Library, N. Y.

13. Map, Orthographical View of the American and British Armies on the 7th & 8th of October 1777. by Rufus Putnam.

"Stillwater 31st March 1778 -

We the Subscribers Being appointed to View and apprise the  
Several Farms in Saratoga District, Do Now Apprise the farms  
belonging to John Neilson in Lot No. fourteen in the Incampment  
of the Honl. Majr. Genl. Gates army the Effects taken and Made  
use of by our army in Maner following) viz

Two tuns Standing Grass used as Pasture...	L <sup>4</sup> - LS+0+0
forty Bushels of Potatoes Taken by the Soldiers...	2/.....6 "0" 0
To fifteen pounds Worth of Pasture...	15" 0" 0
The above apprizd by us according the Best of our Judgmen	

Cornelyas T. van den Bugh  
Charles Moon

Stillwater March ye 31...1778 -

We the subscribers Being appointed by the Comdt.- of S. (?) 7  
District to apprise the Fences that was Taken and Burnt by our  
army on the Farm belonging to John Neilson on Lot No. fourteen....  
Three Hundred and fifty four Rods of fence apprizd by us.  
L70 #16" 0

Cornelyus T. Van den Bugh  
Charles Moon<sup>14</sup>

The earliest secondary account of the American position which  
the Neilson House was recorded by Professor Silliman concerning his visit  
to Saratoga in 1819. His guide was Ezra Buel, a participant in the battles  
and recognized as the leading local authority on the battlefield. Silliman  
wrote:

".....The outlines of the camp are still distinctly visible,  
being marked by the lines of defence which were thrown up on  
the occasion, and which although depressed by time, will long  
be conspicuous, if they are not leveled by the plow. My guide  
pointed out the ground occupied by the different corps of the  
army. Colonel Morgan, with the Virginia riflemen, was in  
advance, on the right, that is, nearest the river.....

"The most interesting object that I saw in this camp was house which  
was General Gates headquarters. I am afraid that the traveler may  
not long find this memorable house, for it was much delapidated -  
a part of the roof had fallen in, and the wind whistled through  
the naked timbers. One room was, however, tenantable, and was  
occupied by a cooper and his family. From the style of the  
panel-work and finishing of this room, the house appears to  
have been in its day one of the better sort - the panels were  
large and handsome and the door was still ornamented with brass  
handles."<sup>15</sup>

14. Neilson Papers, Envelope IX

15. Stone, William L., ed., Visits to the Saratoga Battle-Grounds 1780-1880,  
[Albany 1895], pp. 66-67.

While Stone states that the house that Silliman referred to was the Neilson House, it appears that the reference was to the Woodworth House in which Gates quartered, which was located a few hundred yards south of the Neilson Farm. At any rate, the above house is not the same as the present one for the latter was never as fine.

In August, 1821, William Wirt visited Saratoga and wrote:

"The next morning I took another ride with old Ezra Buel to see the American encampment and above all, Gates' headquarters. The old house is still standing. It is a small, red, hip-roofed, one-storied old house that has quite a Revolutionary look."<sup>16</sup>

Although Stone again notes, "This house, known before the battles as well as up to the present time, as the 'Old Neilson House', the reference was again probably to the Woodworth home.

Jared Sparks visited the battlefield in August 1830. His guides were that old recanteur, Ezra Buel, and John Neilson, the owner of the Neilson farm and a participant in the battles. Sparks wrote concerning the American position:

"We rode down to Gates's camp, over the same road in which the American army came out to action. Gates's headquarters were about a mile and half south of Freeman's Farm.

"Within the limits of Gates's old camp, we found Mr. Nelson, who lived there at the time on his own Farm, and was present in the encampment nearly the whole time it was occupied by the American army. He, as well as Buel, recollected the location of several of the different corps of the Army and the Headquarters of the Generals. Arnold, Poor and Patterson occupied Neilson's House, which is now standing and makes the kitchen of his present tenement. Morgan occupied another building of his, which has since been torn down. Gates's headquarters were nearby, a little to the south. The House went to decay, and was taken down the last year. These appear to be all the houses within the encampment."<sup>17</sup>

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16. Ibid., pp. 115-117

17. Sparks, Jared, Journal, Jared Sparks Collection, Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

While both of these men were advanced in years, and while in Fuel's case we know of certain inaccuracies of memory, it is hardly likely that Neilson's memory would have been so uncertain that he was confused about a portion of a house he had built as to have mistakenly identified it. If he were truthful, which for lack of adverse proof, one must assume that he was, he was correct in stating that the kitchen of his home was standing in 1777 and was used as quarters by American officers. He could have conceivably been mistaken about their identity, but not about his house.

The next documentary evidence appears fourteen years later in John Neilson's son, Charles' book. In describing the American fortifications after September 19, 1777, he had the following to say about the family home:

"The Americans now extended and completed their line of breast-works, from the north-eastern angle on the river hills, west across the farm owned by the late John Neilson, Esq., deceased, about three quarters of a mile to the Heights on the left, and to within a few rods of his dwelling house, now occupied by his son the present writer. From the Heights on the left, and a few rods north of the dwelling house, the entrenchment extended south and south-west, and about three quarters of a mile to a great ravine. At the northwest angle stood a large log barn, which was strengthened by a double tier of logs on three sides, and strong batteries....., and out of respect to the owner, who was a very active Whig, it was honored with the name Fort Neilson."<sup>18</sup>

Neilson, in writing concerning the battle of October 7, told that Major William Dyer Ackland, of the Grenadiers, was wounded and brought to General Poor's quarters in the Neilson House.<sup>19</sup>

Because the story of the Acklands has received considerable attention on account of its romantic appeal and because Neilson associated them with the house being studied, and examination of the event has been

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18. Neilson, op. cit., p. 154.

19. Ibid., p. 173.

undertaken in an effort to secure an accurate account of the affair and to determine whether the Neilson House is a part of the story.

John Dyke Ackland was born at Tetton, Somersetshire on February 21, 1747, the oldest son of Sir Thomas Ackland. He entered the army as an ensign in the 33d Regiment of Foot, March 23, 1774. On March 23, 1775, he was advanced to a captaincy and on the following December 16, he became a major in the 20th Foot. He had married Christiana Harriett Caroline Fox Stangwas, daughter of the first Earl of Ilchester. Major Ackland accompanied his regiment to Canada in the spring of 1776, where General Sir Guy Carleton appointed him commander of the grenadiers. He was either joined or accompanied by his wife who was among the officers' wives who accompanied Burgoyne's army on its march southward.

Baroness von Riedesel lists Lady Harriet as one of the women who were quartered near the artillery park below the Great Redoubt on the left flank of the British lines during the fighting at Saratoga. Ackland was wounded through the thighs or legs during the first phase of the fighting of October 7. James Wilkinson tells that he rescued the major in the following words:

".....and with the troops I pursued the hard pressed flying enemy, passing over killed and wounded until I heard one exclaim, 'protect me Sir against this boy.' Turning my eyes, it was my fortune to arrest the purpose of a lad, thirteen or fourteen years old, in the act of taking aim at a wounded officer who lay in the angle of a worn fence. Inquiring his rank, he replied, 'I had the honor to command the grenadiers,' of course, I knew him to be Major Ackland, who had been brought from the field to this place, on the back of Captain Shrimpton of his own corps, under a heavy fire, and was then deposited, to save the lives of both. I took him by the hand and expressed hope that he was not badly

wounded, 'not badly,' replied this gallant officer and accomplished gentleman, 'but very inconveniently, I am shot through both legs, will you Sir have the goodness to have me conveyed to your camp?' I directed my servant to alight, and we lifted Ackland into his seat, and ordered him to be conducted to headquarters."<sup>19</sup>

Lady Harriet, upon learning that her husband was wounded and in American hands, went to General Burgoyne and requested that she be given a pass through the lines in order that she might join the Major. Burgoyne records the following account of the affair:

"When the army was upon the point of moving I received a message from Lady Harriet, submitting to my decision a proposal (and expressing an earnest solicitude to execute it, if not interfering with my designs) of passing to the camp of the enemy, and requesting General Gates's permission to attend her husband.

"The assistance I was enabled to give was small indeed; I had not even a cup of wine to offer her; but I was told she had found, from some kind and fortunate hand, a little rum and dirty water. All I could furnish to her was an open boat and a few lines, written upon dirty and wet paper, to General Gates, recommended her to his protection."<sup>20</sup>

"Mr. Brudenell, the Chaplain to the artillery (the same gentleman who had officiated so signally at General Fraser's funeral), readily undertook to accompany her, and with one female servant, and the major's valet-de-chamber (who had a ball which he had received in the late action then in his shoulder) she rowed down the river to meet the enemy. But her distresses were not yet to end. The night was advanced before the boat reached the enemy's out-posts, and the sentinel would not let it pass, nor even come on shore. In vain Mr. Brudenell offered the flag of truce, and represented the state of the extraordinary passenger. The guard apprehensive of treachery and punctilious of orders, threatened to fire into the boat if it stirred before daylight. Her anxiety and suffering were thus protracted through seven or eight dark and cold hours, and her reflections upon that first reception could not give her very encouraging ideas of the treatment she was afterwards to expect. But it due to justice at the close of this adventure to say, that she was received and accommodated by General Gates with all the humanity and respect that her rank, her merits, and her fortunes deserved.

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19. Wilkinson, James, Memoirs of My Own Times, 3 vols., Abraham Small, Philadelphia, 1816, Vol. I, p. 271.

"Let such as are affected by these circumstances of alarm, hardship, and danger, recollect that the subject of them was a woman; of the most tender and delicate frame; of the gentlest manners; habituated to all the soft elegancies, and refined enjoyments, that attend high birth and fortune; and far advanced in a state in which the tender cares, always due to the sex, become indispensably necessary. Her mind alone was formed for such trials."<sup>21</sup>

The American version differs slightly by denying that the party was delayed arbitrarily, contending that the lady was permitted to land, given shelter in the log quarters of Major Henry Dearborn, and after sunrise taken to Gates's Camp.<sup>22</sup> In his Memoirs, Wilkinson states that the Major had been sent on to Albany, where Lady Harriet joined him.

Whatever delay occurred in permitting the lady to enter the camp, General Gates replied to General Burgoyne in a rather aggrieved tone:

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20. The letter, which gives some idea of Burgoyne's skill as a writer read:

"Sir,

Lady Harriet Acland, a lady of the first distinction of family rank and personal virtues, is under such a concern on account of Major Acland her husband, wounded and a prisoner in your hands, that I cannot refuse her request to commit her to your protection. Whatever general impropriety there may be in persons in my situation and your to solicit favours, I can not see the uncommon perseverance in every female grace and exaltation of character of this lady, and her very hard fortune, without testifying that your attention to her will lay me under obligations.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant  
John Burgoyne"

21. De Fonblanque, Edward B., Political and Military Episodes in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century, Derived From the Life and Correspondence of the Right Hon. John Burgoyne, General, Statesman, Dramatist, McMillan & Co., London, 1876, pp. 296 f.

22.1. Stone, William L., The Campaign of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne and the Expedition of Lieut. Col. Barry St. Leger, Joel Munsell, Albany, 1877, p. 83.

"Saratoga, October 12th, 1777

Sir

I had the honor to receive your Excellency's letter by Lady Ackland. The respect due to Her Ladyship's rank, the tenderness due to her person and sex, were alone sufficient recommendations to entitle her to my protection, considering my preceding conduct with respect to those of your army whom the fortune of war has placed in my hands, I am surprised your Excellency should think that I could consider the greatest attention to Lady Ackland in the light of an obligation.

"The cruelties which mark the retreat of your army, in burning the gentlemen's and farmer's houses as they pass along, is almost, amongst civilized nations, without a precedent; they should not endeavour to ruin those they could not conquer; this conduct betrays more of the vindictive malice of a monk than the generosity of a soldier."<sup>23</sup>

This seems like a very ungracious reply to the English commander's simple and rather dignified note. However, Gates was always aware of the value of propaganda as a weapon; witness his use of the Jane McCrae murder in rousing the people of Hudson Valley.

The next official notice found concerning the Acklands is in the following letter from Gates to General Putnam:

"Albany, 23d Decem. 1777

Dear Sir: I have Granted a pass to Maj. Ackland and his Lady the Honourable Lady Harriet Ackland with their servants to go into New York, convinced it will be for the interest of the United States that they should be permitted to go there on their way to England, with all convenient Expedition. The Major, who in the strictest sense of that Character, is a Man of Honour, has promised me to use his utmost endeavours to procure the Enlargement of Col. Ethan Allen, in return for the Indulgence I now grant Him, and his Family. The particular situation of the Honourable Harriet Ackland, makes the Major the more desirous of immediately getting into New York as soon as possible. That Favour to Her Ladyship at this Critical Junction will the more enhance the Obligation, and the strongest inducement to the Major to exert all his Interest to procure the release of Col. Allen and his restoration to his afflicted Family. I beg you will not suffer the Major to be delayed as I will directly upon my Arrival at Yorktown, transmit you their Approbation of His being allowed to pass thither.

I am Sir, &c.

H. G."<sup>24</sup>

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23. Gates Papers, Library of Congress.

24. Ibid.

Romance did not abandon the Acklands after their repatriation. Fonblanque and others, including most of the local writers on the Saratoga Battles, have told that after Major Ackland returned to England and was serving in Parliament he became involved in an argument with a certain Lloyd who had cast aspersions on American bravery. Heated words led to a duel in which the Major was fatally wounded. The story continues that for two years after her husband's death she was insane, after which period she married Chaplain Brudenell.<sup>25</sup>

The facts appear to have been much more prosaic. Major Ackland died at Pixton, Somersetshire, November 22, 1778, of what was probably a stroke. It is true that on the day of his collapse, November 18, he had met a Mr. Lloyd in a duel that was terminated after a harmless exchange. The cause of the duel was a private quarrel whose nature is not known. Lady Harriet remained a widow for thirty-seven years, dying on July 21, 1815.<sup>26</sup>

As has been noted, Charles Neilson stated that the Major was quartered in the original house, then the kitchen of his home. The next mention that has been found associating the house with the Acklands was made by Benson Lossing writing of his visit in 1848:

"On the summit of the height, three fourths of a mile northwest of Bemis's, the father of Mr. Neilson owned a clearing of a few acres when the war broke out, and he had erected a small dwelling and a log barn thereon. The dwelling, with large additions, is still there, but the log barn, which was picketed and used for a fort, has long since given place to another....."

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25.1. De Fonblanque, *op. cit.*, pp. 301-2.

2. Lossing, Benson L. Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution, 2 vols. Harper Bros., New York, 1831, Vol. I, foot note, pp. 67-68.

3. Brandow, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-161.

26.1. Stone, W. L., "Lady and Major Ackland", Magazine of American History, January 1880.

"Upon the next page are given a group of localities about Bemis's Heights and a miniature map of the engagements there. The picture at the top of the page represents the mansion of Mr. Neilson, as seen from the opposite side of the road, looking eastward. It stands upon the east side of the highway leading to Quaker Springs, about one hundred rods north of the road from Bemis's Heights to the watering places of Ballston and Saratoga. It is a frame house, and the part next to the road is modern compared with the other and smaller portion, which is the original dwelling. The room of the old part (a sketch of which is given in the third picture from the top) is quite large, and was occupied by Brigadier-General Poor and Colonel Morgan, as quarters at the time of the engagements there. It was in this room that Major Ackland, the brave commander of the British Grenadiers, who was severely wounded in the battle of the 7th of October, was kindly received by the American officers, and visited and nursed by his heroic wife, Lady Harriet Ackland, of whom, and the event in question, I shall hereafter speak. The bed of the wounded officer was beneath the window on the left. The door in the center opens into a small bed-room....Where the smaller poplar tree stands was a building which General Arnold occupied; and further to the left the small buildings are upon the spot where the fortified log barn stood, which was the northwest angle of the American works."<sup>27</sup>

Lossing, in telling the story of the Acklands, related that "In the morning she [Lady Harriet] experienced parental tenderness from General Gates, who sent her to her husband at Poor's quarters, under a suitable escort. There she remained until he was removed to Albany."<sup>28</sup>

Writing in 1919, Brandow told that Major Ackland was lodged in the tent of Joseph Bird.<sup>29</sup> Thus we have three accounts of where Lady Harriet joined her husband. The earliest account that is specific on the matter, Wilkinson's, says that the major had been taken to Albany, where his wife joined him. He is supported by Bloodgood, who wrote his The Sexagenary in 1865.<sup>30</sup>

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27. Lossing, Benson L., op. cit., pp. 46-47.

28. Ibid., p. 67.

29. Brandow, op. cit., p. 161.

30. (S. De Witt Bloodgood), The Sexagenary or Reminiscences of the American Revolution, J. Munsell, Albany, 1866, pp. 92-3.

The first identification of the Neilson House as the scene of the reunion is in Neilson's book, written in 1844. While he does not give his authority, it can be assumed that he either invented the story or that he received it from his father, John.

Lossing's account was probably derived from Neilson. Brandow in naming Joseph Bird's tent as the quarters cites no authority, and no other mention of such a tent has been found.

Since no contemporary sources have been found that locate the Ackland's reunion, and since the material that has been discovered is not sufficient to determine where the preponderance of evidence lies, no conclusive statement can be made, beyond saying that the Major may have been nursed by his wife in the Neilson House.

A part of the historical significance of the Neilson House is in its possible associations with various officers who were identified as occupants. In his letter to Schuyler, quoted above, Varick located Arnold and Poor's headquarters as being on the approximate site of the Neilson House, but does not mention the building by name.<sup>31</sup>

Silliman and Wirt told of visiting a house that had been Gates' headquarters which Stone identified as the Neilson House. However, this writer believes that they were referring to the Woodworth House, which was Gates' headquarters. In both of these instances, the visitor was guided by Ezra Buel, whose memory was not always unimpeachable. However, it is doubtful that this man who had participated in the battles and lived in the area most of his life could have been so confused as to mistake the site of the Gates Headquarters.<sup>32</sup>

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31. Supra, p. 9

32. Supra, p. 9

Jared Sparks, with Buel and old John Neilson as his authorities, said that Generals Arnold, Poor, and Paterson occupied the Neilson home and that Morgan was lodged in another building on the Neilson farm.<sup>33</sup>

Lossing identified the house as Poor and Morgan's quarters, and in some manner Learned has been added to the list of occupants during the last fifty years.<sup>34</sup> When the State of New York erected a historical marker along the road in 1927, the house was named as the quarters of Morgan, Poor and Learned.

While recognizing that the evidence is somewhat less than conclusive, the writer believes Generals Poor, Patterson, and possibly Arnold were quartered in John Neilson's house and that Morgan was lodged in a house whose foundation may be located southwest of the Homestead.

The fundamental question that is posed by the research that has been accomplished is whether the house of 1777 is the house that is presently standing on Bemis Heights on the site of Gates' camp.

According to Charles Neilson, the first house that his father built was a log-cabin, erected about 1775.<sup>35</sup> The next explicit reference to the house appears in Sparks' account of his visit in 1830 in which he said, on the authority of Ezra Buel and John Neilson, that the house of that period was an addition to the house of 1777.<sup>36</sup> In this instance it is logical to assume that the two old men knew whereof they spoke and that what they told Sparks was true unless it was an example of Napoleon's definition of history as a lie agreed to.

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33. *Supra*, p. 10

34. *Supra*, p. 11

35. Neilson, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

36. Sparks, *op. cit.*

A fourteen year lapse occurs between Sparks' visit and the next statement concerning the house, which appears in Neilson's book, identifying the kitchen of his residence as the war-time structure.<sup>37</sup>

Four years later the evidence becomes somewhat more definite. Lossing not only says that a part of the Charles Neilson House as of but he also gives two sketches, the first of the house as of 1848, the second of the interior of older portion.<sup>38</sup>

The first sketch is obviously of the same house of which a photograph was made in 1892 and copyrighted in 1902. The second sketch can be identified, with equal certainty, as one of the interior of the structure that stood at the rear of the Charles Neilson farm home when the property was acquired by the State of New York in 1929. Two of the windows and an interior door coincide with those in the sketch. The sketch depicts a cupboard around the window on the right. The floor of the present house has a depression directly in front of where such a cupboard would have been located, indicated that it was worn by frequent reaching into the cupboard over a long period of time.

By the time the State of New York acquired the property the main house had undergone extensive remodeling, and the structure that was identified as the old house stood at the rear, covered with modern siding and attached to a shed.<sup>39</sup> The State moved this building several yards south and faced it westward toward the highway, placing it upon a rather high foundation. The siding was removed and plainer weather boarding, still too modern in appearance, was applied, and a stone fireplace and chimney were installed. The walls are lined with unburned

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37. Neilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-9.

38. Lossing, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7.

39. See Attached photographs.

brick, and the interior was finished with split lathe and rough plaster. This was the appearance of the house when the National Park Service acquired the area in 1941.

By tracing these segments of information one may conclude that unless the house seen by Sparks in 1830 and the one discussed by Neilson in 1844 and sketched by Lossing in 1843 were different buildings, the house that is now located in Saratoga National Historical Park was standing at the time of the battles; remembering that future evidence may prove otherwise.

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Archeological Data

Prepared by John F. Luzader, Park Historian

May 22, 1957

The archeological research program for the Neilson House area must include a reconnaissance of the original site of the homestead and the barn that was fortified and named Fort Neilson. The estimated cost for this research is \$500.

### Landscape Data

Prepared by John P. Luzader, Park Historian

May 22, 1957

Documentary research has failed to provide any descriptions of the appearance of the environs of the Neilson House beyond what is known concerning the general character of the American fortifications in that area, because the historic significance of the building and its grounds is limited to the period of the Battles, September 19 and October 7, 1777, the landscaping of the farmstead should be directed toward reproducing a frontier farm that had been incorporated into a field fortification such as existed at Bemis Heights at the time of the Battles. This would include the appropriate fruit trees and kitchen garden exhibit. Because this was a "new" farmstead, having been established less than three years, care should be exercised in keeping the scene simple and primitive. Estimated cost would be \$7,000.

Furnishings and Exhibition Data

Prepared by John P. Luzader, Park Historian

May 22, 1937

Documentary research has not revealed any information concerning the character of the furnishings of the Neilson House in 1777. However, it is assumed that they were typical of those that would have been found in a frontier farm home of the late 18th century. In the absence of documentary knowledge of the original furniture, the house is currently furnished with early domestic articles that provide an effective interpretive device depicting the home of a colonial farm family. The articles on display are identified by an easel chart that contains pictures of the individual items with an identifying legend. Present planning does not contemplate the acquisition of new or additional articles of furniture.

HISTORIC BUILDING REPORT  
FURNISHINGS AND EXHIBITION DATA

Neilson House, Building No. 1

Prepared by I. J. Ellsworth, Superintendent

August 8, 1963

The furnishing of the John Neilson House will be carried out in accordance with the John Neilson House Furnishing Plan completed in 1961 by Park Historian Agnes M. Downey, National Capital Region. Thirty-one of the 138 items recommended in the above Furnishing Plan are in the Park Collection.

The building, which is the only historic structure in the Park dating back to the time of the Battle of Saratoga, will be so furnished to reflect the historic period when it was used as quarters by American staff officers.

The interior of the Neilson House and its furnishings, particularly the common room, will be viewed by park visitors through the front doorway. This will insure protection of the furnishings from damage and possible loss.

It is recommended that a study be made by the Division of History and Archeology to analyze the merits of several different methods of improving the display of the House that would permit visitors an unrestricted view of the common room and still assure its adequate protection and interpretation. The method selected should enable visitors to see the items on display on the front wall (inside) and over the inside of the doorway as well as a view of the rest of the room and possibly the storage room.

As suggested by Mr. Lewis, Chief, Branch of Museums, in his

memorandum of July 26, 1961 (D6215), to the Regional Director, a copy of which was furnished us, and Mr. Bachensky's memorandum of September 20, 1961, transmitting the above memorandum, a Project Construction Proposal for the Neilson House furnishings will be prepared in the amount of \$5,000.