

13. Saratoga

Geography predestined the historical development of Old Saratoga. Long before European colonization, this area—known as *Sa-rah-to-ga* by the Mohawks—was a crossroads of Indian paths. North-south traffic flowed along the Hudson-Champlain corridor, and various lakes and rivers allowed for east-west traffic into Vermont and the Mohawk Valley. At one point, a significant Native population thrived here, but a cycle of peace and warfare left the area sparsely settled. Kalm observed the destruction first-hand as he traveled through here in 1749, just a year after the end of King George's War.

Marina services are available at the Schuyler Yacht Basin. Discover downtown Schuylerville and use the Champlain Canalway Trail to explore the Old Saratoga area.

Fort Hardy Park

Fort Hardy Park is the former site of a 1755 fort/storehouse constructed during the French and Indian War. It was in ruins when British General John Burgoyne surrendered his army to the Americans during the American Revolution in 1777, stacking their arms on the parade grounds of the old fort in ceremonial fashion. However, these are just the last in a long series of conflicts that transpired here. Between 1687 and 1748, at least five armed engagements of varying sizes occurred near here.

Old Saratoga was originally occupied by the Mohicans. They took advantage of the vast fisheries here on Fish Creek, abundant wildlife, and the transportation corridor. There is archeological evidence that local tribes had a strong trade economy that extended back 1500 years, etching out extensive trade routes that brought copper, tropical shells, exotic chert and other materials from across North America.

By the 1630s, the Mohicans had been driven from the Saratoga area by their traditional enemies the Mohawks. The Mohawks remained in their large defensive villages in the Mohawk Valley but used the Saratoga area to hunt and fish. They also used Saratoga as a staging ground for bands of warriors sent to harass the French settlements in Canada. When Francois-Joseph Bressani, an Italian Jesuit missionary to New France, travelled through Saratoga in 1644, he observed "about 400 barbarians were assembled for fishing."

Tensions on the frontier escalated in 1666 when a detachment of 500 French soldiers, Indian allies and 200 volunteers were dispatched by the Governor of New France to raid the Mohawk settlements near present-day Amsterdam. The attack demonstrated the ability of the French to mount large-scale raids into New York, and provided them useful information about the landscape. This would prove useful over the course of the next century as European conflicts boiled over into the New World.

Notes and Quotes

Kalm - The wood round about was generally cut down. The shores of the river are high, steep and consist of earth. We saw some hills in the north, beyond the distant forest.

In precolonial times the supply of fish in the creek must have been truly fabulous, especially during spring runs of shad and herring, which were still plentiful in the early 19th century. Artefactual and other traces of Indian occupation are near continuous along the full length of the creek. – Archeologist Robert E. Funk.

The Schuyler House

Immediately south of Fish Creek is the 1777 home of American General Philip Schuyler. It is actually the third in a series of manors constructed here; the present home being constructed in just 29 days after it had been burned by the retreating British following the Battles of Saratoga. The first two homes had fallen victim to the continuous cycle of warfare and renewal that plagued these borderlands for more than a century.

Saratoga was initially settled after 1684 when NY Governor Thomas Dongan issued a patent to seven people, including the Schuyler Family, for a tract of land that was twenty-two miles long and extended six miles on both sides of the Hudson River. The patent owners were to pay an annual rent to the crown of twenty bushels of wheat. The Schuyler's took up their plot of land on the south side of Fish Creek.

Through inheritance and purchase the "farm at Saratoga" grew to be a prosperous estate, taking advantage of waterpower from Fish Creek to build bustling mills. The property passed to Philip's grandfather, Johannes Schuyler and he, in turn, passed it to his oldest son, Philip's uncle. In 1745, the estate was destroyed by a raiding party of Indians and French Canadians, and most of the enslaved and free people living here (over 100) were captured. Johannes's oldest son, and heir to the Schuyler fortune, was killed on the spot. No house stood here when Kalm came through in 1749.

The second house built in the 1760s by Philip Schuyler. He turned the war-ravaged farm into a busy farming, milling, and merchandising center, worked by tenants, enslaved people, and artisans (notably Scottish immigrants). With his wheat, flax, and hemp crops, linen mill, sawmills, herring fishery (transporting fish to sell as far away as Jamaica and Antigua), and general store selling goods and services, Philip's Saratoga community and personal wealth grew substantially. Just like in 1745 though, the house, some of the mills, and most of the buildings were destroyed on October 10, 1777, but this time by retreating British forces following the Battles of Saratoga.

In 1831, the Village of Schuylerville was incorporated – the name borrowed from the founding family. Today, the home, restored by the National Park Service, continues to serve as a tangible reminder of the Schuyler Family's contribution to the community, the state, and our nation.

Excerpts from Saratoga NHP.

Notes and Quotes

Kalm- June 25 – Several sawmills were built here before the war, which were very profitable to the inhabitants, on account of the abundance of wood which grows here.

The boards were easily brought to Albany, and from thence to New York, in rafts every spring with the high water; but all the mills were burnt at present.

Kalm - The ground is here turned into corn fields and meadows, but on account of the war is not made use of.

Forts Vrooman, Saratoga, and Clinton

The Saratoga Patent was one of few settled outpost on the borderlands between the British and French colonies in North America. It became a center for trade between the Dutch, English, Natives, and even French traders that smuggled goods from Canada. The community also served as a rampart against French encroachment on British territory in New York and New England.

Hostility between the British and French colonies in North America escalated in 1689. The previous year, England's King James II, a Catholic, was deposed of in favor of Protestants William and Mary in a conflict known as the Glorious Revolution. Having succeeded in securing the English Crown in the name of a Protestant monarch, William entered into a global religious war with France known as the Nine Years War or the War of the Grand Alliance. This was the first in a series of Wars between Britain and France that boiled over into the New World.

When news of War reached New York fear of conflict with New France increased as propaganda surfaced that the French were planning an attack on Albany. The colonists began rounding up Frenchmen, including several French traders in the Saratoga area. Little is known about the imprisoned French traders or the basis of their incarceration, though they were likely thought to be spies. This was the beginning of what became known as King William's War.

Things took a violent turn in the summer of 1689. The Iroquois, disgruntled by the increased French incursions into their territory, were encouraged by the settlers of New England to raid New France. 1,500 Mohawk warriors attacked the small settlement of Lachine, capturing or killing many of the residents.

That fall, the French and warriors from the Wabenaki Confederacy retaliated, killing three settlers on the Saratoga Patent. After the raid, it was resolved to build a fort around the home of Bartel Vrooman. Fort Vrooman was the first fort in Saratoga, but it was evidently abandoned in 1690 when the French and Canadian Natives passed through during their attack on Schenectady, later dubbed the Schenectady Massacre.

Another fort would not be built at this location until 1739. The French had violated the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht that ended Queen Anne's War (1702-1713) when they erected a massive stone fort at Crown Point. The Colonial Governor was worried that the frontier was left unprotected, so Colonel John Schuyler took it upon himself to build Fort Saratoga on his own property along the flats here, not far from his own home.

Although constructed around 1739, a permanent garrison was not installed at Saratoga until the outset of King George's War in 1744 when General George Clinton ordered a detachment of soldiers to be stationed here. Fort Saratoga was poorly constructed and the officers complained about the inadequate conditions of the fort, including unfinished floors, leaking roofs, and the lack of wells and ovens. It was ill-prepared for the French attack in 1745.

The First Battle of Saratoga during King George's War took place in November 1745. A large French force of 300 soldiers and an equal number of Native allies set out from Crown Point to attack the British in either New England or Albany. On the evening of November 27, the Frenchmen's Native allies seized Schuyler's mill and went to his home to request his surrender. Schuyler responded by firing his musket

several times, but was killed in the return volley. Alerted by the action at Schuyler's house, Fort Saratoga was destroyed.

Fort Clinton was built on the footprint of Fort Saratoga in 1746, but the troops garrisoned here continued to feel the depredations of manning a wilderness outpost. The second and third Battles of Saratoga were raids that occurred in February and April of 1747 while the troops were gathering firewood. These raids left minor casualties of soldiers and settlers outside the walls of the fortification, but was succeeding in deflating the morale of the troops.

Peter Kalm described a ruse used by the French to trick the British into leaving the protection of the fortification during the fourth Battle of Saratoga in June 1747. When the British fired upon them, the Natives threw themselves on the ground, pretending to be wounded. When the British troops came out to take them prisoners, the French came out of the bushes, cutting off their return to the fort and preventing their closing of the gate. The French and their Native allies overtook Fort Clinton, setting it on fire as they departed. This was the last fortification built at this location.

Notes and Quotes

Kalm - I shall only mention one, out of many artful tricks which are at play here, and which both the English and the French who were present here at the time told me repeatedly. A party of French, with their Indians, as they had previously resolved, went to have a nearer view of the fort. The English fired upon them, as soon as they saw them at a distance; the Indians pretended to be wounded, fell down, got up again, ran a little way, and dropped again. Above half the garrison rushed out to take them prisoners; but as soon as they were coming up with them, the French and the remaining Indians came out of the bushes, betwixt the fortress and the English, surrounded them, and took them prisoners. Those who remained in the fort had hardly time to shut the gates, nor could they fire upon the enemy, because they equally exposed their countrymen to danger, and they were vexed to see their enemies take and carry them off in their fight, and under their cannon.