

TOWN of SARATOGA HISTORIAN'S OFFICE

12 Spring Street Schuylerville, NY 12871

(518) 695-3644 / historiantosaratoga@gmail.com

Visit our blog at <https://historianatsaratoga.wordpress.com/> and twitter @historysaratoga



Upper Schuyler Saw Mill

Prepared by Sean Kelleher, Historian, Town of Saratoga in January and February of 2018.

Literature Review: In January of 2018, Town Councilman Jim Jennings requested a review of the Town Historian's files to gather information about the Upper Schuyler Saw Mill. I reviewed my files and found the following:

- A 2006 Lakes to Locks Passage: Pocket Parks Phase II, Victory Mill Interpretive Park Project
- *Archeological Verification Fish Creek Saratoga Battlefield Siegeline* funded by the American Battlefield Protection Program Grant # GA2255~09~026 prepared for Saratoga PLAN prepared by John Milner Associates, Inc West Chester, PA December 2010
- *The Saratoga Estate of General Philip Schuyler 1745-1839 an interpretive and historic grounds report* by Stephen G. Strach 1986
- *The Story of Old Saratoga and History of Schuylerville* by John Henry Brandow, 1900
- *Surrender Negotiations Accounts*
- *Around the Town of Saratoga*, Images of America series by Thomas N. Wood III

There are more sources out there including consulting with Christine Valosin, curator at Saratoga National Historical Park, on Schuyler's Mills and the use of enslaved individuals to operate the saw mills. I also understand that the Fort family has photos of the old saw mill.

Summary of Accounts: The Upper Schuyler Saw Mill was in the area of the proposed park. American troops crossed Fish Creek near the park during the siege period of the Battles (11-15 Oct 1777). American and British officers negotiated the Convention (Surrender) at Saratoga near this spot. (There are at least 4 different locations where negotiations discussions took place.)

This mill was a major source of income from the Philip Schuyler family. The Schuylers were the richest family in Albany during this period. The upper saw mill was part of the Schuyler's Atlantic World commerce that included Albany, New York City, England and the Caribbean Islands. The saw mill was operated by enslaved people.

Suggested Next Step: As the committee moves forward, I would suggest a focus on the interpretive story to tell and how to tell them. The story should fit the interpretive plan of Saratoga National Historical Park. We want the visitors to have a seamless experience with the story. The community has a National Park and a Scenic Byway involved in helping our community. Lakes to Locks Passage and Saratoga National Historical Park have expertise in interpretive signage and waysides. They are also well versed in the new technology and accessibility issues.

The park location is fantastic because it puts the visitor where history happened. They can see the location of the saw mill. They can imagine a tent in or near the park. As Governor Seymour said, "on

this spot, American Independence was made a great fact in the history of nations." This is a great opportunity to tell the story. This is an important story, just a few days ago, President Trump said in the State of the Union, "...it was home to an incredible people with a revolutionary idea: that they could rule themselves. That they could chart their own destiny. And that, together, they could light up the world. That is what our country has always been about. That is what Americans have always stood for, always strived for, and always done... Memorials to the heroes of Yorktown and Saratoga -- to young Americans who shed their blood ... (a) living monument to the American people. A people whose heroes live not only in the past, but all around us -- defending hope, pride, and the American way."

Literature Excerpted Passages

Lakes to Locks Passage: Pocket Parks Phase II, Victory Mill Interpretive Park Project 2006 : The relevant elements of this FHWA National Scenic Byways Program are:

The Victory Mill Interpretive Park site is located in the Village of Victory in Saratoga County, just east of US RT 4 (designated Byway). The park site provides an overlook of Fish Kill (Kill is the Dutch word for Creek), the mill (currently planned for restoration) and is centrally located in the village at the corner of Evans and Pine Streets...

This project will create an interpretive park for the Village of Victory, which retains much of the original architecture of the "company mill town." The unique quality in Victory is that much of the mill town still remains, and is ideally suited to serve as a community park with "living history" and views of Fish Kill (Kill is the Dutch word for Creek). The park will include interpretive signs, gazebo/bandstand, landscaping, parking, picnic tables and benches. A walking tour will also be developed so Byway visitors can "read" the architectural landscape to understand the evolution of a mill village...

The Village of Victory Mill Park will serve as the centerpiece of the Lakes to Locks Passage byway visitor interpretive experience of a "company mill town." The interpretive park is centrally located within a village with several interpretive stories to tell. To date, Victory has been known as the home of the Saratoga Monument (maintained by the National Park Service), commemorating the surrender of British General Burgoyne to American General Gates in 1777. This event was the culmination of the "Siege of Saratoga" considered by many historians as the "turning point of the American Revolution." But Victory has other stories to tell, and the most distinctive one is the company mill town.

The unique quality in Victory is that much of the mill town still remains, the park site is surrounded by company houses, the building that housed the company store, the company (now US) post office, and churches on land donated by the company. The location is ideally suited to serve as a community park with "living history" and views of Fish Kill (Kill is the Dutch word for Creek). The park will include interpretive signs, gazebo/bandstand, landscaping, parking, picnic tables and benches. A walking tour will also be developed so Byway visitors can "read" the architectural landscape to understand the evolution of a mill village.

DEFINING FEATURE: Fish Creek upper ford—upper Schuyler milldam

The Fish Creek upper ford located at the upper Schuyler milldam figured prominently in the action of the siege. On the morning of the 11th, American troops used the ford to cross Fish Creek for the anticipated advance on the British south redoubt. As what proved to be a skirmishing engagement developed, some of the American troops who had crossed then shifted toward the west to form the left wing of the American siege line.

Location of the crossing place can be interpreted via the site of the upper saw mill, which was not destroyed by the British as happened to the lower mills. The saw mill was still standing in 1837 when surveyor Harman Van Alen drafted a plat of the Schuyler Estate. The saw mill of 1837 and its dam were positioned immediately adjacent to one another, with the waterwheel apparently situated beneath the saw mill platform and employing water flow from a reservoir pool or tank that filled directly from Fish Creek instead of via a headrace. Logic and the slow-changing nature of traditional saw mill technology during the period indicate that the saw mill facility present during the Siege of October 1777 embodied the same configuration as was depicted in 1837; no evidence has been found to contradict such an assertion and an account of 1825 quotes a veteran who asserted that the arrangement remained in its 1777 state. Comparison of the 1837 draft with a present-day topographical map suggests that the saw mill dam was positioned spanning Fish Creek approximately 300 feet below or northeast of the present roadway bridge at the village of Victory. This location matches closely with James Wilkinson's specific attribution of the site as being three-fourths of a mile above Schuyler's lower mills. (emphasis added by SPK)

A problematic aspect of this locational interpretation for the upper saw mill has to do with the character of the topography and the configuration of the creek bank at the present day. The location at present lacks a level terrace area by the creek to serve as site for the saw mill platform itself and which would have enabled direct road access, a necessity for the operation of such a facility; instead the bank falls away sharply on the southeast side of the creek, forming an escarpment. On the positive side of the balance, the 1837 estate plat appears fairly precise as to the location, and the shape of the creek banks and the topography on the northwest side does provide the seeming remnant of a shallow bowl-like area suggestive of a former impounded millpond. It is possible that, perhaps due to the hydraulic engineering activities associated with the construction of the textile mill in the 1840s, the alignment of the watercourse has shifted somewhat from what it was in the era of the saw mill. It is also possible that major flooding has wrought a natural transformation in the topographic configuration.

The ford itself, the existence of which was enabled by the dam's impoundment of the deep and at this point naturally rapid-flowing Fish Creek, was located just below the dam, but the water in the ford was evidently still too deep and fast-flowing for effective use by foot soldiers carrying flintlock firearms and black powder. Lt. Colonel James Wilkinson, a senior member of Gates' staff, stated that on October 11 he and his horse twice crossed and recrossed Fish Creek "at a deep and rapid ford just below the dam," but Wilkinson's is the only account that makes reference to such a direct fording of the creek. Wilkinson observed that earlier that morning the men of Morgan's Corps had to adopt the expedient of crossing by scuttling along the logs bunched up against the upper side of the dam. In

Wilkinson's words, the Corps had "crossed me Fish-kill on a raft of loose logs, at the foot of a mill pond about three-fourths of a mile above me Saratoga mills." Lt. Colonel Henry Dearborn, Morgan's second-in-command, agreed that their men "had crossed on scattering logs." Private Samuel Bacon of Woodbridge's Massachusetts militia regiment, also involved in the west wing of the October 11 advance, stated that "our regiment crossed on the logs in the mill dam." General Hoyt, a military-historical tourist of 1825 guided by a veteran of Woodbridge's Regiment, remarked that upon "reaching the creek, we passed it on floating limbers, resting against the mill dam, and my companion remembered that his regiment passed the mill pond in the same manner and at the same place as they advanced to attack the British lines."

The upper ford would apparently also have figured in the history of the siege as the crossing location for the few artillery pieces that the Americans transferred to the west flank of the siege lines.



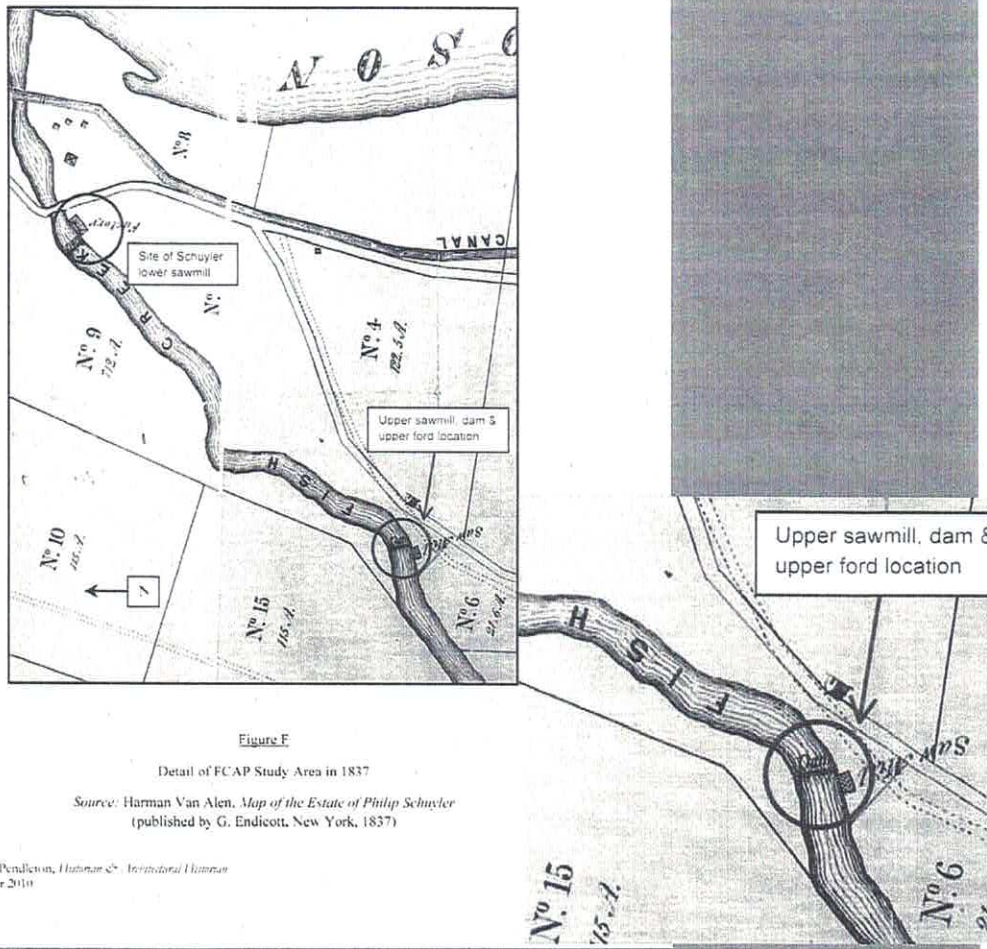


Figure F

Detail of FCAP Study Area in 1837

Source: Harman Van Alen, *Map of the Estate of Philip Schuyler*
(published by G. Endicott, New York, 1837)

Philip E. Pendelton, *Historian & Ancestral Historian*
December 2010

The Saratoga Estate of General Philip Schuyler 1745-1839 an interpretive and historic grounds report by Stephen G. Strach 1986. This report was to guide interpretation at the Schuyler House. It also addressed some of the myths shared by the Old Saratoga Historical Society docents. Strach was a National Park ranger and a fantastic compiler of information. Strach report is described by the National Park Service as "highly opinionated." This is an edited version to remove some of those opinions.

(There was a discussion in the past on the location (Victory or Grangerville) of the Upper Schuyler Saw Mill . Based on the work of Philip Pendelton (see above) and NPS Historian Eric Schnitzer, the upper saw mill is near the proposed park.)

Saw mills supported the most important industry on the Saratoga estate -- lumbering. At same time prior to 1745 several saw mills were established along Fish Creek. When or who built them or who operated them is a mystery. By 1745 several saw mills were in operation on and near Fish Creek. Records of the French and Indian raid of Saratoga in 1745 mention the existence of several saw mills; An unidentified Frenchman records :
"...We passed a very rapid river [Fish Creek], for which we were not prepared, and came

to a saw-mill, which two men (a negro and a Dutchman) were running, and in which there was a large fire..... We set fire to everything good and useful; for instance, four fine mills,"

Another French account of the same raid also mentions "...four mills,..." Further confirmation is made by Swedish naturalist Peter Kalm, who traveled through the area in 1749: "...Several saw mills had been 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 thence to New York in rafts, every spring with the high water; but all the mills were burnt at present..."

During the early part of the 1760s, Colonel Philip Schuyler began to develop his Saratoga estate, including that area where the previous mills upon Fish Creek had stood. At this time "...A saw mill, erected under his supervision, and managed by men of his own training, converted the forest trees into boards and shingles..." Much of Schuyler's financial gain came from the harvesting of the massive white and pitch pine trees common then. Lumber cut was then rafted down the Hudson River during periods of high water or tide to Albany and in turn shipped to New York.

By 1763 Philip Schuyler hid two saw mills located on Fish Creek. These were designated the "Lower" and "Upper" saw mill. The "Lower" saw mill was situated on the south bank of Fish Creek, near the present U.S. Route 4 bridge. ... The largest of the two was that at the "Upper" saw mill complex.

A 1776 description of this saw mill are Charles Carroll (19 Sep 1737 – 14 Nov 1832) "...the lands about Saratoga are very good,A stream called Fish Kill,was close by...and turns several mills, viz., a grist mill, two saw mills one of them carrying 14 saws, and a hemp and flax mill..." Carroll was the delegate to the Continental Congress in 1776. He was part of an unsuccessful diplomatic mission that Congress (along with Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Chase) sent to Canada in hopes of winning the support of French Canadians. He was the only Catholic signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Another 1776 description comes from Major Joseph Bloomfield of the 3rd New Jersey Regiment (Jersey Grays) "...Our Regt. Marched & lodged at Saratoga.....It is common on the North-River to find the Saw-Mills go with 13 & 14 Saws at a sweep so that a log is at once divided in Boards. Genl. Schuyler & Judge Duer's mills go in this manner..." William Duer (18 March 1743 – 7 May 1799) developed an estate (modeled on Schuyler's) in Fort Miller. Duer was a British-born American lawyer, developer, and speculator from New York City. A Federalist, Duer wrote in support of ratifying the United States Constitution as "Philo-Publius." He had earlier served in the Continental Congress, the convention that framed the New York Constitution and signed the United States Articles of Confederation. Duer was very friendly with Alexander Hamilton and served in the first Treasury Department.

Receipts for boards and lumber cut for private merchants in New York City and for use by the Continental Army from 1772 - 1779 indicate that sizes of board cut at the "Upper" saw mill were on the average 1 thick and 14 feet long and that plank was 1 1/2 inches thick and 14 feet long. Some wartime receipts indicate that lumber was also produced that was 15, 16, 19, and 20 feet -long.

From 1775 - 1783: the saw mills were almost always "...constantly employed..." Only one major interruption occurred when in October 10th, 1777 the "Lower" saw mill was burnt to the ground by the British and the "Upper" saw mill suffered from heavy vandalism at the hands of the Continental Army during the period September - October 1777. The "Lower" saw mill was rebuilt in 1778 in the same style as the one burnt by the British in 1777.

A Frenchman visiting the area in 1780 noted that he saw "...two or three saw mills..." in operation.

Primary descriptions of the number of saws situated within the "Upper Mill" complex differ slightly. For instance, in July of 1783 Count dal Verme, traveling with George Washington's party, noted that they: "...Visited a saw mill in which fifteen saws simultaneously cut a log into sixteen boards."

(There are other descriptions of the mill from a later period in the Strach Report.)

The Story of Old Saratoga and History of Schuylerville by John Henry Brandow, 1900 is the bible of local history in this community. This is also a source that is dismissed by archeologists due to the era when it was created. Brandow needs to be considered in the frame that is almost 120 years old. There have been many advancements in history yet this is the most comprehensive source for Old Saratoga.

Mrs. Grant, of Lagan (Scotland), in her "Memoirs of an American Lady," draws a very interesting picture of Old Saratoga as it appeared about 1768, as also of the master spirit who was then the director of its fortunes.

The Colonel, since known by the title of 'General Schuyler,' had built a house [yet standing] near Albany, in the English taste, comparatively magnificent, where his family resided, and where he carried on the business of his department. Thirty miles or more above Albany, in the direction of the Flatts, and near the far-famed Saratoga, which was to be the scene of his future triumph, he had another establishment. It was here that the Colonel's political and economical genius had full scope. He had always the command of a great number of those workmen who were employed in public buildings, etc. They were always in constant pay, it being necessary to engage them in that manner; and were, from the change of the seasons, the shutting of the ice, and other circumstances, months unemployed. At these seasons, when public business was interrupted, the workmen were occupied in constructing squares of buildings in the nature of barracks, for the purpose of lodging artisans and laborers of all kinds. Having previously obtained a large tract of very fertile lands from the Crown, on which he built a spacious and convenient house, he constructed those barracks at a distance, not only as a nursery for the arts, which he meant to encourage, but as the materials of a future colony, which he meant to plant out around him.

"He had here a number of negroes, well acquainted with felling of trees and managing of saw mills, of which he erected several; and while these were employed in carrying on a very advantageous trade of deals and lumber, which were floated down on rafts to New York, they were at the same time clearing the ground for the colony the Colonel was preparing to establish.

"This new settlement was an asylum for everyone who wanted bread and a home. From the variety of employment regularly distributed, every artisan and every laborer found here lodging and occupation; some hundreds of people, indeed, were employed at once. Those who were, in winter, engaged at the saw mills, were in summer equally busied at a large and productive fishery.

Surrender Negotiations Accounts

Wright, Robert K., Jr. "Saratoga Surrender." *Encyclopedia of the American Revolution: Library of Military History*, edited by Harold E. Selesky, vol. 2, Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006, pp. 1033-1035. *U.S. History in Context*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3454901397/UHIC?u=high27072&xid=d522b8c9>. Accessed 2 Feb. 2018. – this provides an overview of the Surrender

SARATOGA SURRENDER. 17 October 1777. On 13 October, John Burgoyne's officers unanimously agreed he should treat for surrender on honorable terms, and Burgoyne sent an officer to Horatio Gates proposing to begin negotiations. Gates consented, and the next day Major Robert Kingston, Burgoyne's adjutant general, was led blindfolded to the American headquarters. To the amazement of the British emissary (as well as Gates' aide, James Wilkinson), Gates immediately produced from his pocket a paper saying that only unconditional surrender would be considered. While this has sometimes been called a blunder, Gates was simply following classic European protocol. Burgoyne countered with an equally conventional response: in addition to demanding the honors of war, he now proposed that his command be paroled "upon condition of not serving again in North America during the present contest." This was a technical distinction, but one of great consequences that had been last used by a British commander at Kloster-Campen during the Seven Years' War. The men of the defeated force did not become prisoners of war, but rather would be allowed to depart the theater of war and fight elsewhere—or to release British troops in European garrisons, which would then come to America and fight. Uncertainty as to the status of Clinton's expedition and unwillingness to risk casualties in a frontal assault on the British defenses led Gates to agree to the outline of the terms on the 15th, provided that Burgoyne signed the capitulation by 2 P.M.

This last proviso was a blunder. Although Burgoyne had no hope of escape, he interpreted from the urgency of this time schedule that his adversary was worried about the British forces from the south. So Burgoyne agreed "in principle" but insisted on more time to work out details. Both commanders then appointed representatives with full powers to negotiate for them: Wilkinson and militia brigadier general William Whipple (a Signer of the Declaration of Independence) were the Americans; Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga (1820–1821). John Trumbull's painting of General John Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in October 1777 dramatizes the moment when Horatio Gates rebuffs Burgoyne's offer to turn over his sword. Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Sutherland and Captain James Craig were their counterparts. They met between the lines and drew up articles of capitulation that all four signed at 8 P.M. At 11 o'clock that night Wilkinson was given a letter from Craig saying Burgoyne would sign the agreement if it were termed a convention rather than a capitulation. Gates promptly sent his consent, incorrectly feeling that there was no material distinction between the words.

On this same evening (the 15th) Burgoyne learned from a Loyalist messenger that Clinton's forces had taken the Highlands, had reached Esopus, and had probably gotten to Albany. He called a council of war to consider this development. His officers voted 14 to 8 that he could not honorably withdraw from a treaty he had promised to sign and, by the same majority, that the favorable terms should not be thrown away on the strength of the Tory's dubious report. Burgoyne now seemingly attempted to out-blunder Gates. He announced that he was not bound by these votes and, to stall for time, on 16 October he

informed Gates he had learned that the latter had detached a considerable force, which meant that the Americans might no longer have the numerical superiority that had persuaded him to start negotiations. Burgoyne, therefore, wanted to verify the remaining American strength. Gates sent Wilkinson to ask Burgoyne if he intended to resume hostilities. Faced with the possibility of being crushed, Burgoyne finally agreed at 9 A.M. on the 17th.

Riding forward on 17 October in a splendid uniform, Burgoyne was introduced by Wilkinson to a small, plainly clad American general. "The fortune of war, General Gates, has made me your prisoner," the Englishman reportedly said. "I shall always be ready to testify that it has not been through any fault of your Excellency," Gates is supposed to have replied. Burgoyne handed Gates his sword and Gates returned it to Burgoyne. The senior officers of both sides then went to dinner while Burgoyne's men laid down their arms, as the terms specified, under their own officers' orders. Under the agreement, officers would retain their side arms and the Convention Army would be allowed to march to Boston under guard to await the arrival of transports to take them to Europe. Meanwhile, as required by honors of war, American musicians played British or German marches to show respect for the defeated, and British and German musicians played American tunes.

A political firestorm erupted when Washington and Congress learned of the terms of the surrender. Washington correctly recognized that the British could simply rotate troops and make good the supposed losses. More to the point, the Virginian knew that the British had renounced the Kloster-Kampen agreement as soon as their men were out of French custody, and he feared similar duplicity.

Mintz Max M., *The Generals of Saratoga: John Burgoyne and Horatio Gates* Yale University Press, 1992, This is a typical description of the surrender negotiations that took place near the saw mill.

... (Gates) appointed Wilkinson and Brigadier General William Whipple, and Burgoyne sent Kingston and Captain James H. Craig for the Forty-seventh Regiment. A tent was pitched between the advance guards of the two armies near Schuyler's saw mill, and the conferees went earnestly to work. By eight o'clock in the evening they signed and exchanged articles of capitulation and returned to their respective headquarters. ...

Wilkinson, James, *Memoirs of My Own Times* Abraham Small, Philadelphia 1816. Accessed at <https://ia800201.us.archive.org/22/items/memoirsofmyownti01wilk/memoirsofmyownti01wilk.pdf> Wilkinson was the American Deputy Adjutant General (Gates' top aide at 20 years old) provides a detailed memoir. Wilkinson's accounts need to be reviewed carefully. When it was first published, it was met with skepticism. The memoir has a self-aggrandizing tone. Wilkinson seems always to be at just the right point to take charge or make the right decision. Wilkinson has notorious reputation for his multiple act of conspiracy. Wilkinson was a participant in the Conway Cabal, Vice President Aaron Burr conspiracy of 1805-06, and spying for Spain as "Agent 13" while the senior commander of the US Army. There is no doubt that Wilkinson was one of the greatest scoundrels in the history of the United States.

Camp at Saratoga, 15th Oct. 1777

On receiving this message the General was pleased to name me as one of his representatives, and at my request appointed Brigadier-general Whipple of the militia, to accompany me; and by concert with Major Kingston, a tent was pitched between the advanced guards of the two meet armies, on the first bank just above General Schuyler's saw mill, where we met Lieutenant-colonel Nicholas Sutherland and Captain James H. Craig of the 47th regiment, on the afternoon of the 16th, having for our secretary Major Pierce, an aid-de-camp of General Gates.

Having produced and exchanged credentials, we proceeded to discuss the objects of our appointment, and at 8 o'clock, P. M. we signed and exchanged articles of capitulation, and separated to report to our respective Generals. ...

Camp at Saratoga, 15th Oct. 1/2 past 10 o'clock.

Sir,

Upon reporting the proceedings of this evening to Lieutenant-general Burgoyne I was happy to receive his approbation of and ready concurrence in every article that has been agreed on between us; it however appears upon a retrospect of the treaty, that our zeal to complete it expeditiously has led us unto the admission of a term in the title very different from his meaning, and that of the principal officers of this army, who have been consulted on this important occasion. We have, Sir, unguardedly called that a treaty of capitulation, which the army means only as a treaty of convention. With the single alteration of this word, Lieutenant-colonel Sutherland and myself will meet you at the stipulated time tomorrow morning with the fair copy signed by General Burgoyne.

I hope Sir, you will excuse my troubling you so late, but I thought it better than by any delay to prevent the speedy conclusion of a treaty which seems to be the wish of both parties, and which may prevent the further effusion of blood between us, I beg your immediate answer, and am,

Sir,

Your obedient and humble servant,

(Signed) JAMES HENRY CRAIG,
Capt 47th Reg.

There is much more to the Wilkinson account.

Around the Town of Saratoga, Images of America series by Thomas N. Wood III 1999.



This book identifies Schuyler's saw mill in the caption. "Schuyler's saw mill was located on the banks of Fish Creek in Smithville. Spared by the retreating British, the mill was used to saw the lumber for rebuilding the Schuyler House in November 1777. "

This photo is in the collection of the Town of Saratoga Historian's office. On the back of the photo, written in blue ink is "Schuyler Saw Mill." This is the only documentation. The notation may be a question. The photo was reviewed by Tom Wood, Sean Kelleher and Eric Schnitzer. The three historians do not believe that this is Schuyler's Upper Saw Mill. The photo does not look like that section of Fish Creek. The source of power for the mill may be a steam engine rather than a water wheel. The Strach report notes a "Visitors' Guide " in an 1877 Schuylerville Standard, "the charred ruins of a burned saw mill." There are reports of other images of saw mills (Fort family). If the committee wishes to use this image, more research should be done.

Acknowledgement: This was prepared with consultation from Drew Alberti of Lakes to Locks Passage and Eric Schnitzer of Saratoga National Historical Park.

Saw Mill and Sawmill are used in various accounts, it was decided for this report to standardize the name to saw mill.