

The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 13, No. 2

April — June 2017

The Dutch Door of the Schuyler Home at The Flatts



Dutch Door from a 1673 painting

Submitted by Kevin Franklin, Colonie Town Historian

Editor's Note: In the July-September 2013 issue of the Historical Oracle we presented a short article by long time Historical Society Board Member Charles Flanagan. Charley gave us a brief history of the Schuyler home at "The Flatts" noting the historical and political importance of the Schuyler family and the home that formerly stood on that property. Charley also wrote of the Historical Society's acquisition of the Dutch Door that served as the front door of the house. In this issue, Town Historian Kevin Franklin expands on the history and significance of The Flatts, the Schuyler family that lived there, and the importance of the events that occurred there.

The old Schuyler home at the Flatts faced the "Little River", a sprout of the Hudson River separated by one of the three prominent islands in the river between South Troy and the Menands/Colonie area as seen on many early maps. The islands were mostly obliterated by the construction of I-787 in the 1960's. Numbers of generations of the Schuyler family lived in the old home continuously for almost 250 years. Philip Pieteron Schuyler purchased the farm known as "The Flatts" from the VanRensselaers in the year 1672. The Schuyler home at the Flatts was constructed in stages. The earliest stage of the house is referred to as the western wing in

James T. Myers book: “History of the City of Watervliet, N.Y. 1630 to 1910.” The eastern portion with its gabled roof came later.

According to Myers’ history, “Phillip Petersie Schuyler built the Schuyler Mansion now standing south of this city ---- the east half of the original building was burned in 1771.” However; in Dr. Paul Huey’s booklet “Archaeology at the Schuyler Flatts 1971-1974”, he indicates that the home burned in 1759 and the interior of the home was rebuilt shortly thereafter. Huey continues: “A stone foundation was constructed for a wing flanking the rear of the Schuyler House ---- but it was not rebuilt with the rest of the house. It may have been a kitchen.”

Myers’ book finds it important enough to describe two old doors of the home at The Flatts and how they were saved from “the fire” of 1771: “The west wall (imported Holland brick two feet thick) was left intact. The new eastern half was rebuilt in 1772. The original door saved from the fire was replaced in the brick wall opening into the western half. The front facing east has in place the original two-part door, the old knocker, and original shutters also saved.” Myers’ book was printed in 1910.

Thus, a discrepancy exists as to the year of the

fire(s) at the Schuyler home. Myers’ book claims the information about the fire came from the recollections of Mrs. Richard P. Schuyler, one of the last line of Schuyler’s to live at the Flatts before it was sold to the Beattie family in the early 20th Century. Dr. Huey’s date comes from research of primary documents including the book: “Memoirs of an American Lady” by Anne Grant who lived with Madam Schuyler during the French and Indian Wars era. Most photographs of the old Schuyler home date to the late 19th to early 20th centuries and clearly show the home differed architecturally between the front (eastern) and rear (western) parts of the house, but the two were connected.

On November 15, 1924, a schematic drawing of the floor plan of the Schuyler home (see image, page 3) was drawn by Cuyler Reynolds, a prominent Albany historian. (Cuyler Reynolds was the first curator of the Albany Institute of History and Art in 1899, serving in that position for ten years. Reynolds was also the historian for the City of Albany.) This drawing shows the center hallway leading from the front door and running all the way back into the western wing of the structure. One would suppose that this hallway would have led to the other “original door” separating the two halves of the home.



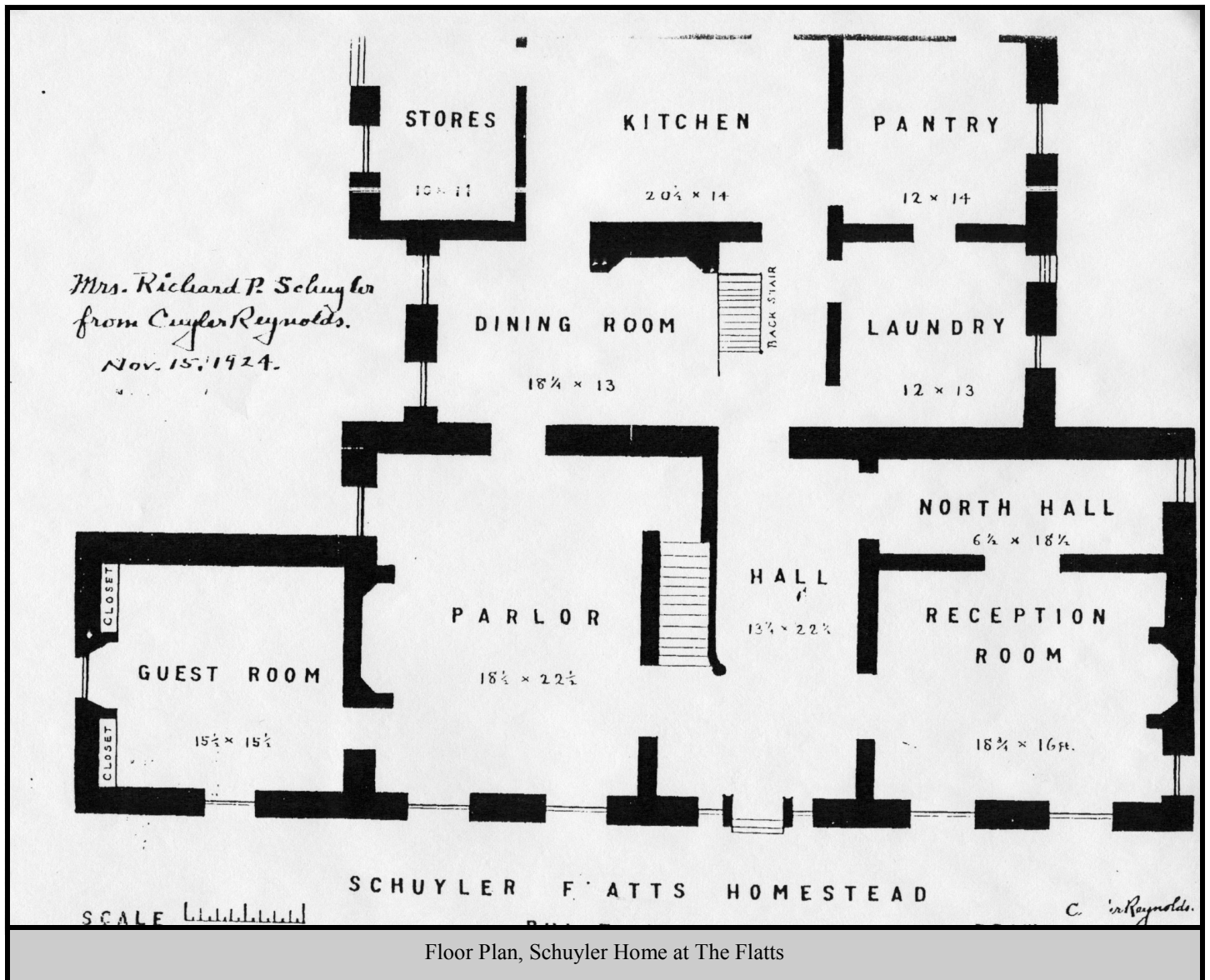
Original Dutch Door, exterior view
Schuyler home at The Flatts



Original Dutch Door, interior view
Schuyler home at The Flatts

The detailed photographs of the interior and exterior of the two part Dutch door shows it was clearly within the east wall of the house facing the river. Another photo shows what appears to be another large door, not a two part or “Dutch Door” within in a robust frame in what appears to be an unusually thick wall inside the house. Is this the door in the 2 foot thick “west wall” as mentioned in Myers’ History of the City of Watervliet? The photos were taken some twenty plus years after Myers’ book was written and do not show “the old knocker” which may have been removed by a Schuyler family member as a memento before the home was sold out of the family line, or perhaps the knocker is on the opposite side of the door in the photo, or it is not the same “original door” from the oldest part of the home. We may never know.

Myers’ book clearly indicates that two old doors were prominent fixtures of the home but apparently only one double or “two part” door commonly referred to today as a Dutch Door. A Dutch door is also referred to as a “Stable Door”, meaning a door in a livestock stable which the bottom half would keep a horse or cow secured within the stable while still allowing it to poke its head outside the upper half of the door. On a home, a Dutch door would keep young children inside and unwanted animals outside while still providing an opening to allow for fresh air to enter the home. It also acted as somewhat of a meager barrier to prevent a person from just wandering into a home. The 1950’s saw a resurgence in the use of these doors on ranch style homes being built in the United States.



Floor Plan, Schuyler Home at The Flatts



Schuyler Home at The Flatts — circa 1890's

Of the collection of photographs of the Schuyler Home at the Flatts, only a very small number show the Dutch door on the front (east wall) of the home and only a single known photo exists of what may be the other interior door in the house mentioned in Myers' history. A previous issue of the *Historical Oracle* reported that the Dutch door had been rescued from the home at the Flatts before the structure was deliberately set ablaze by arsonists on November 10, 1962 leaving only some of the remaining brick walls standing (see photo by Paul Huey taken Nov. 11, 1962).

Many years after the fire, the door made its way to Mr. Miles Cornthwaite of Malta, N.Y. Mr. Cornthwaite happens to be a direct descendant of the Schuyler family of the Flatts. He donated the door

to the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie in March, 2012. The door rested in the Historian's Office since that time, but recently HSTC Trustees Tony Brankman and Charley Flanagan took the lead in getting the door hung in a specially built, sturdy wooden frame. Special thanks to Dennis Fitzgerald, who donated his time and the materials needed to construct the wooden frame, which has enabled this very large and heavy Dutch Door to once again rest in a frame which can be easily dismantled and re-assembled. Now the Dutch Door of the Schuyler home at the Flatts can be viewed by the public. It is currently on display in the carriage house on the grounds of the Pruyn House on Old Niskayuna Road for the public to enjoy. (see photos on page 5).



Interior of original Dutch Door from the Schuyler Home now on display at the Pruyn House



Exterior of original Dutch Door from the Schuyler Home now on display at the Pruyn House

Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members:

- Brian & Katie Sessler**
- Dr. Michael & Lynn Radlick**
- Susan Lawson**
- Grace Nazarian**

Welcome!!

NOTICE! ~ NOTICE! ~ NOTICE!

Please visit the new "Arrowheads & Stone Points" display from the collection of the Historical Society at the Pruyn House in the HSTC Room on the 2nd Floor. The arrowheads were excavated from the Veeder Farm on Consaul Rd. and the Karl Farm on Sand Creek Rd, as well as the personal collection of Trustee Charley Flanagan. They will be on display until Thanksgiving. Special thanks to HSTC Trustee Charley Flanagan for setting up the display room.



Arrowheads found on the farm of M. G. Veeder, Consaul Road, Albany Co. Probably the site of an Indian encampment. The oldest and last Indian in this area was killed in an arrow on the hillside near Little Hill Church, Little Hill Road.



Please visit our Facebook Page. Just search:

Historical Society Town of Colonie

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$ _____ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name _____

Address _____

Cit/Town _____ Zip Code _____ Home Phone # _____

Cell Phone Number _____ E-Mail _____

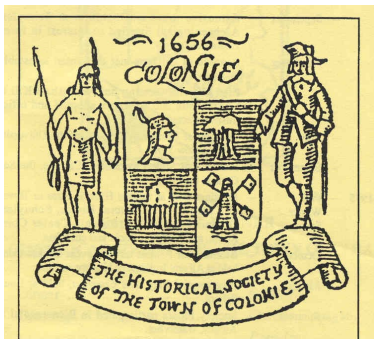
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE

Kevin Franklin: Town Historian

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Historical Society Founded 1971

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our next membership meeting will be Sunday, October 22nd at 2 pm at the Library. Stephan Bielinski, the former Director of the Colonial Albany Social History Project, will be presenting a program: "An Afternoon with the People of Colonial Albany and their Neighbors".

On Sunday, November 19th at the Library, Anthony Opalka and Harris Sanders will present: "Moving Fort Frederick Apartments".

When you visit Pruyn House this fall be sure to see the "Arrowhead and Stone Points" exhibit in the Society's Museum Room on the second floor (see announcement on page 7.)

Looking forward to seeing you this fall.

Fran McCashion, President