

HVVA Tour of Saratoga

21 September 2013

10am.

Introduction

Today's Saratoga County formed part of the northern edge of New World Dutch settlement in the Hudson Valley. Settlement occurred beginning in the late 17th century, but was hampered by repeated raids by Native Americans and French soldiers during the several conflicts between 1688 and 1748—notably King William's War (1688-1697) and King George's War (1744-1748), both of which resulted in the destruction of settlements at Saratoga (present-day Schuylerville). The earliest European settlers were of Dutch extraction. Some farmsteads survived the wars; the cultural landscape and method of constructing houses in the area were described by Pehr Kalm, who passed through the area in 1749:

The farms were commonly built close to the river, on the hills. Each house has a little kitchen-garden, and a still lesser orchard. Some farms, however, had large gardens. The kitchen-gardens afford several kinds of gourds, water-melons, and kidney-beans. The orchards are full of apple-trees...

The houses hereabouts are generally built of beams [sic—he means posts] of wood, and of unburnt bricks dried by the sun and the air. The beams are first erected, and upon them a gable with two walls, and the spars. The wall on the gable is made of boards. The roof is covered with shingles of fir. They make the walls of unburnt bricks, between the beams, to keep the rooms warmer; and that they might not easily be destroyed by rain and air, they are covered with boards on the outside. The cellar is below the house.

The farms are either built close to the river-side, or on the high grounds; and around them are large fields with maize.

The use of brick nogging was widespread throughout the Hudson Valley; its early description here is of particular note, however. The second house on today's tour (exterior only, unfortunately) is a rare survivor of this type, varying from it in some details.

Several bent-framed 18th century houses survive in Schuylerville. These include the Marshall house, the former Dutch Church Parsonage, and a small building which was probably originally constructed as a store.

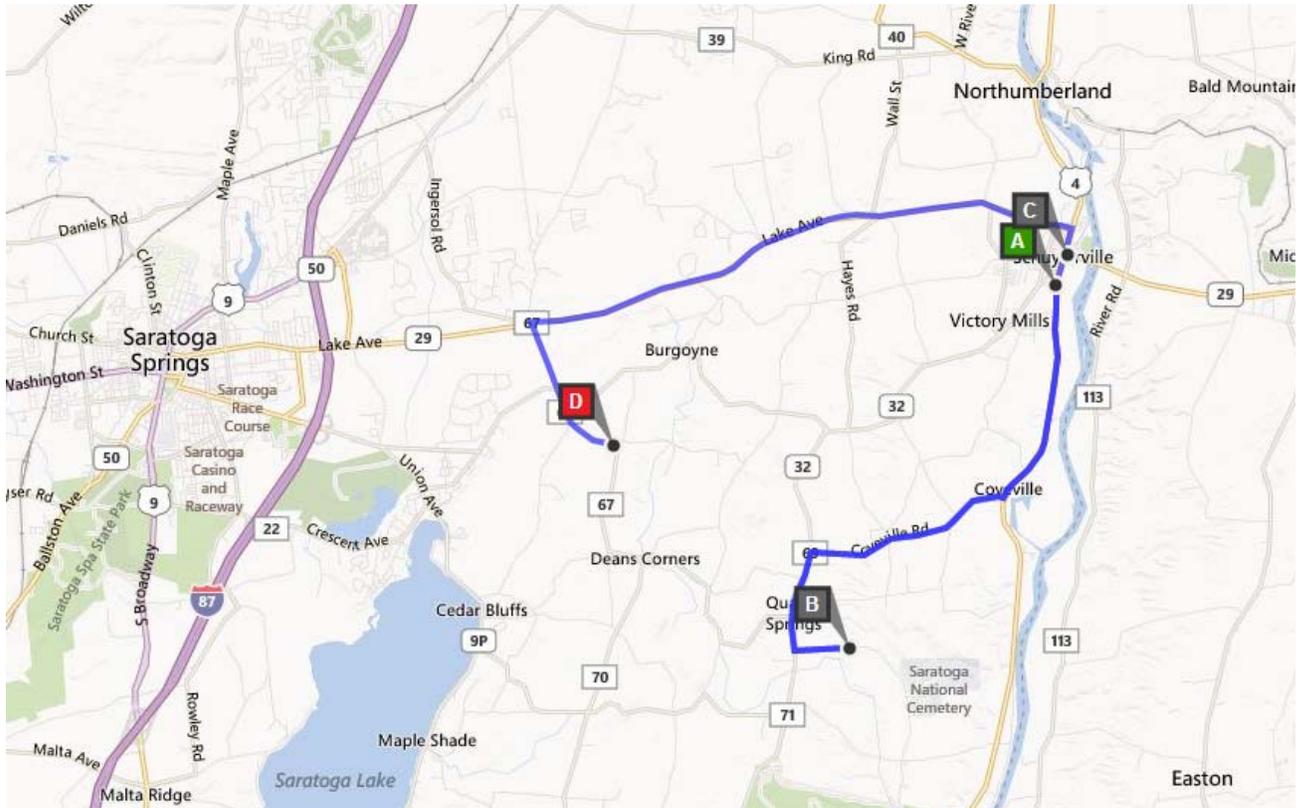


Photo of the Marshall house, taken by W. K. Sipperly of Mechanicville, NY, before substantial alterations were undertaken in 1868. The Marshall house, which was built for Peter Lansing in 1770-73, was requisitioned for use as a military hospital and refuge in 1777. This center-passage gambrel-roofed dwelling is bent framed, with substantial beams spaced between two and three feet apart and spanning over 26 feet. You can read more about the history of the house here: <http://www.themarshallhouse.org/story.html>



The old Dutch Church Parsonage. Constructed c.1791, this center passage house has exposed-beam ceilings, and formerly had expressed firebacks on its end walls. The photo above dates to c.1900 and was used to create postcards of the building, which at that time was misidentified as the Burton house and thought to have been erected before the Revolution.

Each of the stops on today's tour are no more than 8 miles or so apart. Here is a general map, showing their relationship to each other:

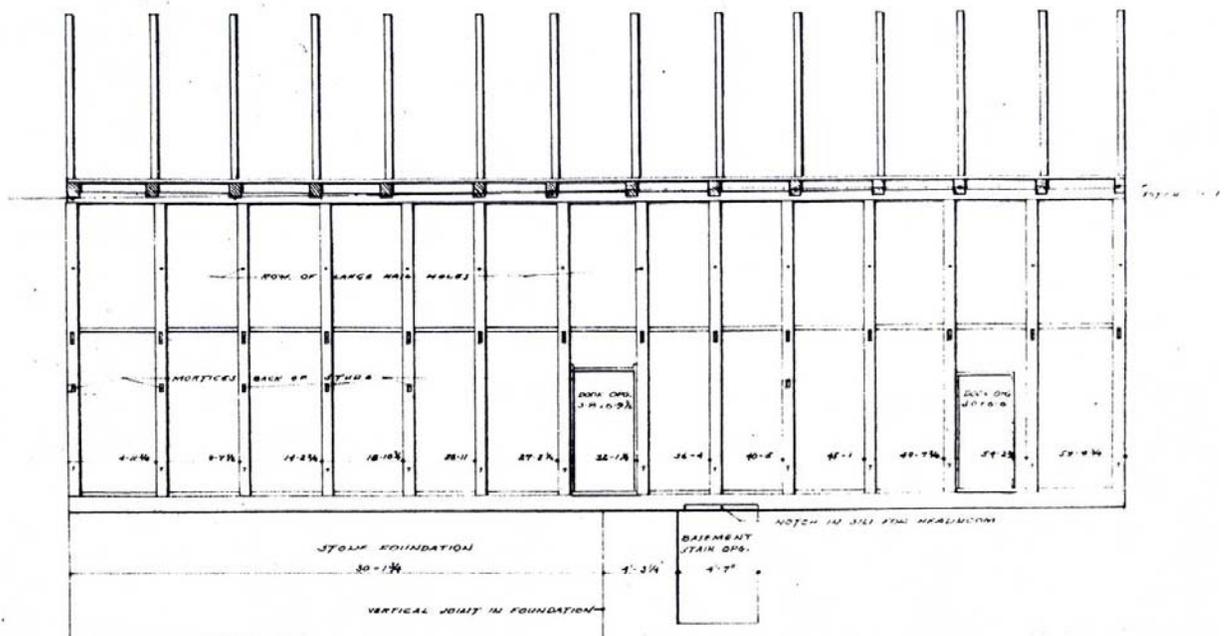


Stop A: The Phillip Schuyler House 10am

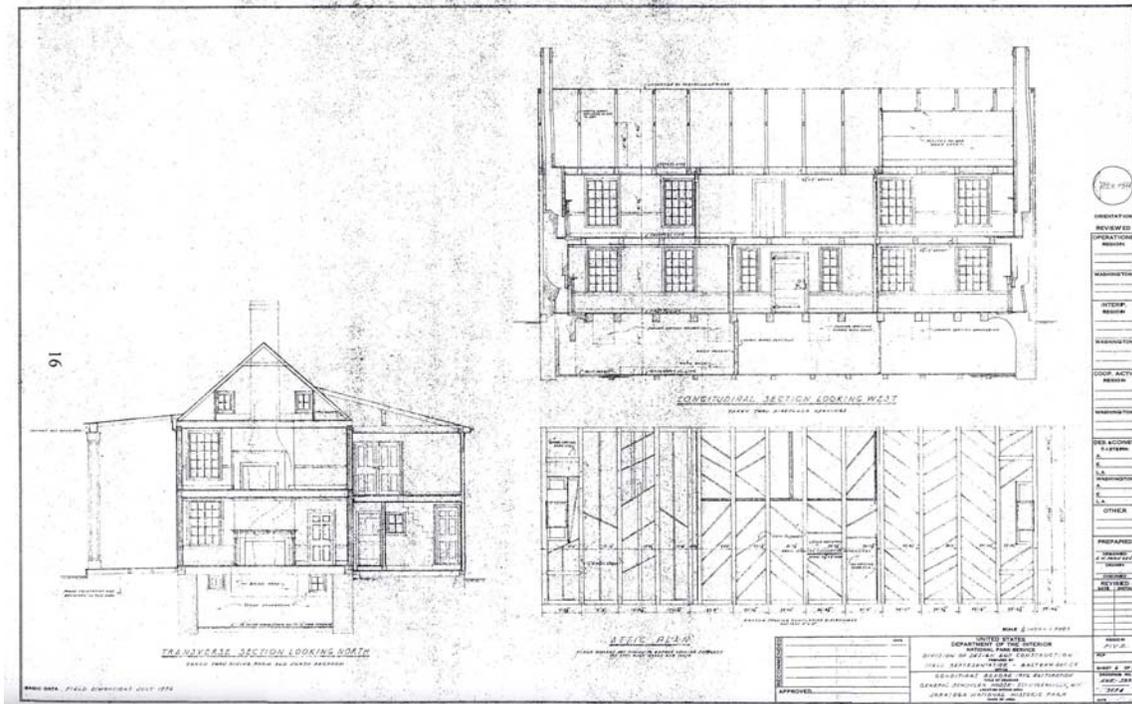
The Schuyler house was constructed some time soon after 1777, when an earlier house on the site was burned by the English army. The house sits on what may be an earlier foundation. Look in the basement for clues to that building's appearance.



The kitchen wing is of particular interest, being of an early bent-framed house form, with nogging as described by Kalm. The second floor retains substantial finishes associated with its use as a slave dormitory. The main portion of the house is also bent framed; this was revealed during restoration by the National Park Service in the 1950s. A framing elevation drawing was done as part of that work:



Section drawings and reflected framing plans executed at that time show additional details of the framing:



The house was occupied by members of the Schuyler family until 1839 when it was sold to George Strover, whose descendants occupied the house until the property was incorporated into the National Park. Strover was responsible for constructing the two-story “piazza”—popular at the time for its reference to Mount Vernon. This feature, and others added by Strover, was removed during the 1950s restoration of the house.



A 19th century view of the house, showing the piazza added by Strover c.1840.

Stop B: The John Neilson House at the Saratoga Battlefield (about 11:30 or so)

Directions from Stop A to Stop B.

1. Depart US-4 toward State Garage Rd 2.6 mi
2. Turn right onto Coveville Rd / CR-69 2.4 mi
3. Turn left onto RT-32 1.2 mi
4. Turn left onto Duell Rd 0.6 mi
5. Arrive at 159 Duell Rd, Schuylerville, NY 12871

The last intersection is RT-32; if you reach Wilbur Rd, you've gone too far

We will be boarding a shuttle at the Old Saratoga Muzzleloading Club at 159 Duell Road. The shuttle runs about every 20 minutes.

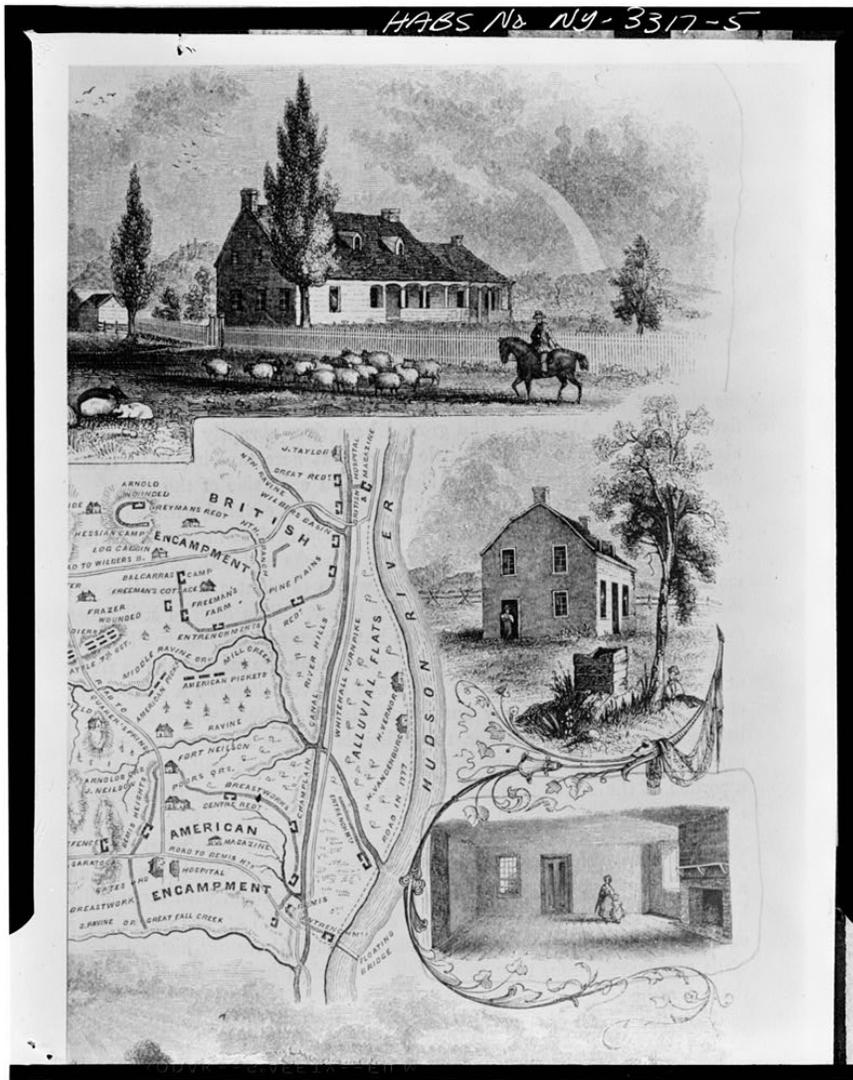
Today's tour coincides with the 75th anniversary celebration of the Saratoga Park, and with the Grand Encampment being held on the battlefield site. Unfortunately, because of the encampment, we will not be able to enter the Neilson house, so I've included some information about it here.



The house is a rare survivor of a one-room bent-framed dwelling of the type constructed by tenant farmers and pioneer settlers in the northern Hudson Valley in the 18th century. The house as you see it today was restored to its appearance during the Revolutionary War era events which occurred on this site in 1777.



A 19th century engraving gives you an idea of what was lost when the majority of the building—probably dating to the late 18th or very early 19th century—was torn down:

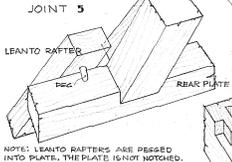
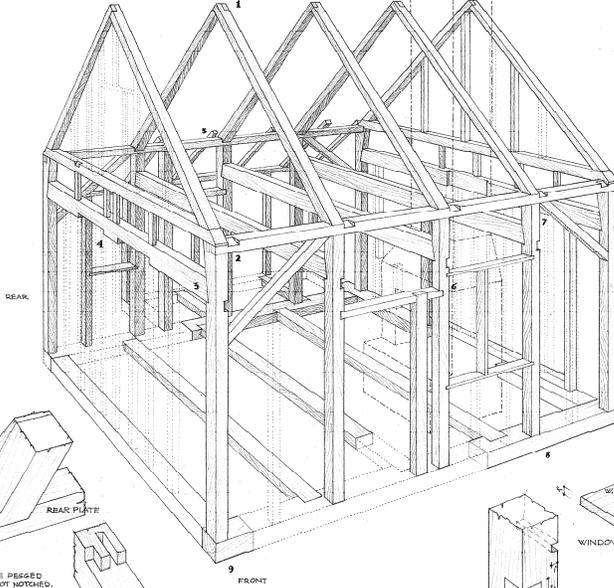


The present-day house is seen in the engraved view in the top of this image—the house as it was extant in 1777 consisted of the small wing at the right. The house was built by John Neilson between 1775 and 1777.

HABS drawings of the house (two are included here, there are more on the HABS/HAER website) give a good idea of the framing used in the construction of this modest dwelling.

PERSPECTIVE FRAMING DIAGRAM

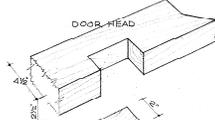
ORIGINAL FRAMING SHOWN IN FULL LINE AND WITH WOOD INDICATION. FRAME PIECES OF OLD WOOD NOT PART OF THE ORIGINAL FRAME OR IN THEIR ORIGINAL POSITION ARE SHOWN IN FULL LINE ONLY. NEWER FRAMING IS INDICATED WITH A DOT-DASH LINE. GIMNEY & FIREPLACE IN A DOT-DASH LINE.



NOTE: LEAN-TO RAFTERS ARE DRESSED INTO PLATE. THE PLATE IS NOT NOTCHED.



NOTE: PLATE IS SHOWN WITH THE UNDERSIDE UP TO REVEAL THE MORTISE FOR SQUARE STUDS & CUT FOR RAFTERS WINDOW FRAMES.

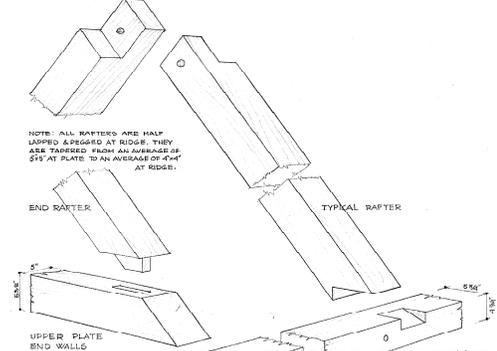


DOOR & WINDOW FRAMING JOINT 6



EXPLODED JOINTS

RIDGE JOINT 1



NOTE: ALL RAFTERS ARE HALF LAPPED & PEGGED AT RIDGE. THEY ARE TAPERED FROM AN AVERAGE OF 2 1/2" AT PLATE TO AN AVERAGE OF 4 1/4" AT RIDGE.



CORNER JOINT 2

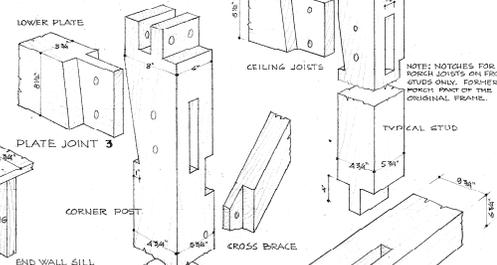
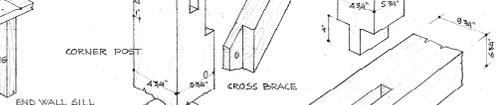
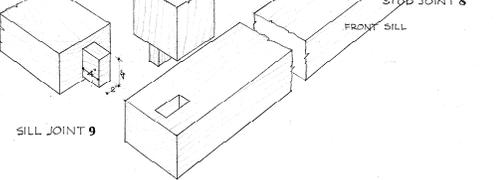


PLATE JOINT 3



SILL JOINT 9



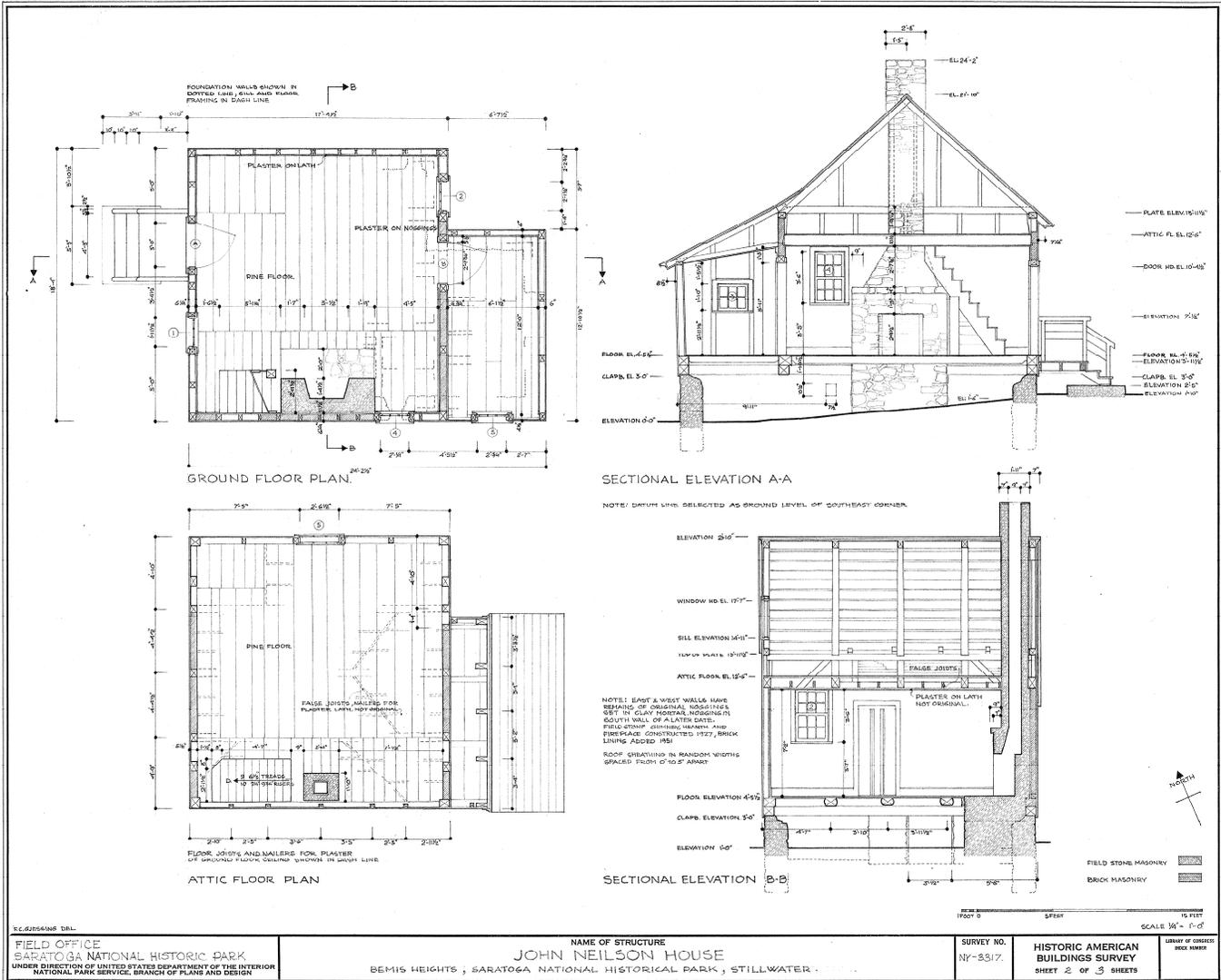
NOTE: JOINTS ARE DIAGRAMMATIC AND ARE NOT TO SCALE. ALL DIMENSIONS INDICATED ARE AVERAGE SIZES. ORIGINAL FRAME PIECES ARE OF CHESTNUT, OLD FRAMING NOT PART OF THE ORIGINAL FRAME ARE ALSO CHESTNUT. NEW FRAMING PIECES ARE GENERALLY PINE.

F.C. GRESSING DEL.
FIELD OFFICE
SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK
UNDER DIRECTION OF UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE
JOHN NEILSON HOUSE
BEMIS HEIGHTS, SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK, STILLWATER, SARATOGA COUNTY, NY

SURVEY NO.
NY-2317
HISTORIC AMERICAN
BUILDINGS SURVEY
SHEET 1 OF 2 SHEETS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
TEXT NUMBER



The interior of the Neilson house features exposed nogging, as mentioned by Kalm, and as seen at the Schuyler house.

Read more about Saratoga National Historical Park here:

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/4/hh4k.htm

Stop C: Lunch (about 1:30 or so)

We'll board a shuttlebus back to the parking lot, then go to the Espressohuis, 31 Ferry Street, Schuylerville, for lunch.

Directions from Duell Road to the restaurant (about 7.3 miles, 11 mins):

1. Depart **Duell Rd** toward RT-320.6 mi
2.  2. Turn **right** onto **RT-321**.2 mi
3.  3. Turn **right** onto **Coveville Rd / CR-692**.4 mi
4.  4. Turn **left** onto **US-4** 3.0 mi
5.  5. Turn **right** onto **RT-29 / Ferry St** 259 ft
6. **B** 6. Arrive at **31 Ferry St, Schuylerville, NY 12871**

The last intersection is Canal St. If you reach Reds St, you've gone too far

After lunch, we'll go to a property owned by Gay and Alvin Gamage.

Stop D: 226 Tobias Robens house, 226 County Route Route 67, Town of Saratoga (Aiming for 2:30 or so).

Directions from Restaurant to Stop D

1. Depart **RT-29 / Ferry St** toward Canal St 259 ft
2.  13. Turn **right** onto **US-4 / RT-29 / RT-32 / Broadway** 0.3 mi
3.  14. Turn **left** onto **RT-29 / Spring St (Gulf on the corner)**
4.  15. Turn **left** onto **Stafford Bridge Rd / CR-67** 1.8 mi
5. Arrive at **226 CR-67, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866**

If you reach Wagmans Ridge Rd, you've gone too far

The Tobias Robens farmstead, now owed by Alvin and Gay Gamage, includes two houses and a number of outbuildings. The main house is believed to have been constructed in 1832; a second dwelling is located in back—it is thought to date to the late 18th century.

Sean Kelleher, Town of Saratoga Historian, has provided two historic images of the house, which was known as Orchard Hill Farms and received guests:



N. Y. Telephone 17-F-14, Saratoga Springs Exchange
P. O. R. F. D. No. 1, Saratoga Springs, N. Y.

ORCHARD HILL FARMS

A fine old Colonial dwelling, picturesquely located among the hills on the east side of Saratoga Lake, one mile east of Stafford's Bridge. There are no finer views among the Adirondack foothills than those from WAGMAN'S RIDGE: Saratoga Lake for miles, the spires, towers and roofs of many of the prominent buildings of the City of Saratoga Springs; Lookout Point on Mt. McGregor, where Gen. U. S. Grant spent his last days, and the great Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's million dollar hospital; and in fact four mountain ranges in New York and Vermont. Improved roads from Saratoga Springs, with plenty of garage space at the farm, makes the fifteen minute run a very attractive spot for families owning their own car. There is milk in abundance from the large farm dairy and our own splendid gardens furnish fresh vegetables. The cuisine is excellent. An ideal, homelike restful spot. Terms reasonable.

MRS. FRED PECK, Proprietor.

Gay Gamage has provided the following description:

When you come in the driveway, notice the yellow barn directly in front of you. The west (left) side appears to be crooked. It is, on purpose. The beams were bent outward to form a corncrib on the second floor. This building was a carriage house. There was a larger hay barn to the west, which was falling down, as well as a tie-up, which formed the west side of the barnyard. The carriage house was widened at some point. There is a smaller, probably later, building near it that we call the tractor shed. These barns were always yellow.

In the backyard is a range of buildings that were moved together at some point. On the left is our current shop. There was an outhouse just to the left as you went in the door. When Alvin was cleaning it up, he found a gravestone upside down in the ground. We set it up in the myrtle patch. It was originally on Bill Hanehan's farm about 1/2 mile down the road. The stones there were moved to Schuylerville. Next is an open space for a garage, and then our "breezeway". This used to be where they scalded the hogs, and there were two large iron kettles here. I have geraniums in one of them next to the smokehouse. The building on the east end is what we call "the old house". This was built some time in the 1790s. We don't know when. It has wainscoting, a fireplace (the back of the it shows outside), and the original door. There are hooks in the ceiling, and one pole for hanging blankets to divide the space. When they were building the house across the road (burned in the early 1940s), two families lived in this house. There were 12 children, and the women divided the work. One looked after the children and the other did the cooking.

There is a brick smokehouse between the old house and the 1832 house.

Tobias Robens built the main house in 1832. There is a marble plaque with his name and date which was originally in the east fireplace. The house consisted of two rooms downstairs with a kitchen in the ell. The ell was widened and extended at some point. Come in the front door, and notice the diamond pattern around the door. This is repeated around the parlor fireplace and mopboard. The columns are like those around the parlor fireplace. We think the porch and bay window were put on by Nathaniel Bennett, probably in the 1870s. Both the front and side porches slope inward at the edges to built-in drains. The living room fireplace was removed when the bay window was added. You can see where the floor is patched in. The previous owners replaced the fireplace, but Alvin put the marble sides and hearth back. They never threw away any pieces that came out of the house.

There are oval fans at the east and west ends of the house. The front walk ends in a carriage mounting block. Originally there were two other stones on top of the one that's left, but they were removed before our day.

There are carpenter locks in the living room and parlor with brass door knobs.

The kettle and brick oven in the dining room were torn out, and Alvin built them back. There is a board in the closet in the dining room that comes up to reveal a tin box built into the floor. This is where Nathaniel Bennett kept his money. Supposedly people would come to him to borrow money, and he would say that he would think about it, and for them to come back. He also is supposed to have planted the ginkgo tree in the front yard.

The cellar floor is the top of the ledge, and there is a large cistern built into one corner. There used to be a windmill which pumped water to a cistern up on the hill, and then down to the house.

We have original hardware throughout. There's lots to see!



General overview of the Gamage farmstead.

From the Gamage property, the Northway can be accessed at either of two exits. Here's a general map (You are located at the lower left hand corner of this map):



W. R. Wheeler
September 2013