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# The Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture

April – June 2018

## Newsletter

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South end of Abraham Hasbrouck House following restoration of wall and casement windows.

### Progress in the restoration of the Abraham Hasbrouck House, Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz

Not much has been happening outwardly on the Abraham Hasbrouck House since the interior restoration was completed in 2012. Since then, a more detailed furnishing plan has been developed by curatorial consultant Kate Johnson to represent the family's lifestyle in 1760s and is being implemented. Much attention has been focused on resolving interior moisture issues. This year, the Hasbrouck Family Association has funded two studies by Bob Gabalski of Lothrop Associates; one to simulate grade reduction around the house and one radar-scanning the stone walls to map voids that may be contributing to water infiltration. A high-tech moisture monitoring system will be installed to determine sources and problem areas.

Over the past year, new attic casement windows were made by Karsten Engle (Bristlecone Restoration) following shop drawings by John Stevens, with hardware forged by Jonathan Nedbor. Last month, Yankee Construction installed the windows and, in the process, removed two 19th-century windows in the south end and filled the openings with stone. Next on the agenda: the restoration of the front wall and windows.

## Vanished Vernacular III

# The Schuyler-Staats House, Albany, New York

By Walter Richard Wheeler

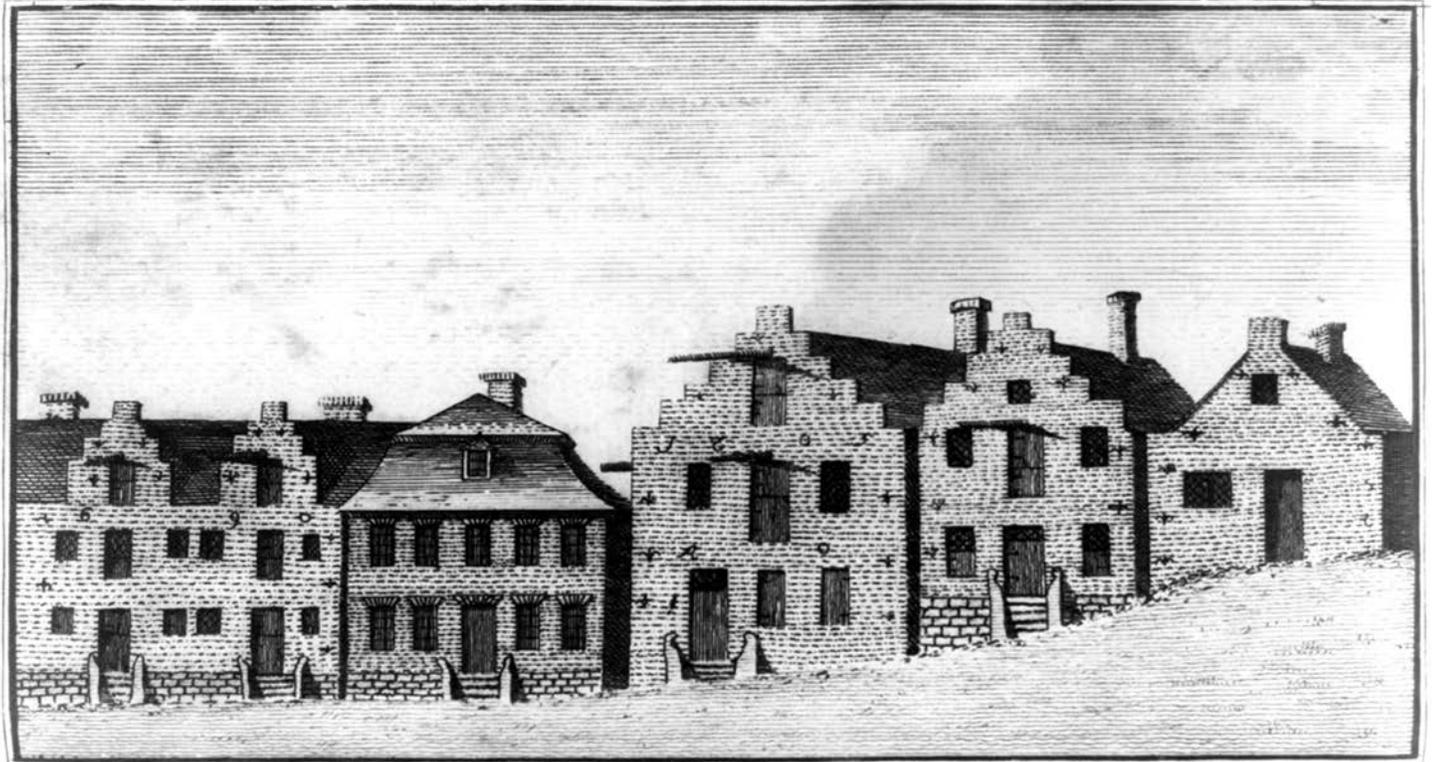


Fig. 1 – “A View of Houses in the City of Albany,” from the *Columbian Magazine*, December 1789.

### Introduction

One of Albany’s longest-tenured architectural landmarks, the Schuyler-Staats house (more commonly known as the Staats house in 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts), said to have been built in 1667, was razed in 1887, within a year of its having been lionized during the city’s bicentennial celebration and the installation of a bronze plaque celebrating its long history. Of some small consolation is the fact that the plaque survives, and has decorated the three buildings which have, in succession, occupied its site.

The Schuyler-Staats house was celebrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and by some even today – as a landmark of Dutch colonial culture, but it hardly looked the part. What about the Schuyler-Staats house, if anything, was Dutch, anyway? Some historians, attempting to explain its visual disparity with other iconographic examples of 17<sup>th</sup> century New World Dutch vernacular architecture, have suggested that the Schuylers were

Anglophiles, and that they had attempted to model their home on English rather than Dutch prototypes. But is this necessarily the case? A close look at all the materials available which document the appearance of this building and its history, including recently discovered photographs, suggests otherwise.

### Owners and Place in the Community

The early history of the house and ownership of its site is somewhat clouded, and a definitive occupation history of the site will have to await the work of another scholar. A 19<sup>th</sup> century source gives this version of the site’s earliest recorded history:

this lot, nine rods on Jonker street, was patented in 1667 to Cornelis Steenwyck, and that Capt. John Schuyler occupied 55 feet of it in 1680. In that year what is now Norton street was laid out, and was to have been continued to Broadway...<sup>1</sup>

Joel Munsell, 19<sup>th</sup> century Albany historian, corroborated this interpretation with his research, and added that a portion of the interest in the property was transferred to Robert Lewis in 1792.<sup>2</sup> More recently, it has been suggested that Philip Pietersen Schuyler purchased a 54-foot wide lot and built a house on the east half of it in about 1659. In 1667 his title to the property was confirmed and he built a house on the west half of the lot and either remodeled or built a new house on the east half of the lot.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the actual early history of the building, it is known that the western half of the house was occupied by members of the Schuyler family until just before the Revolution. Margarita Schuyler moved into it in about 1763. In 1777 it was purchased by Henry Staats.<sup>4</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century this same building was well-known as the site of Robert Lewis' City Tavern – the meeting place of the Albany Committee of Correspondence, Safety and Protection beginning in 1774, site of the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence in the city, and starting point for stage coaches. In 1784 it was the site of a “great dinner...given by Gov. George Clinton and Heer P. J. Van Berkel, the Dutch ambassador.” Unfortunately, as one of the principal meeting places in the city, it was also the site of the sale of a female slave owned by Margaret Schuyler in that same year.<sup>5</sup>

Of the east half of the house, one source records that “Mayor John Schuyler, Jr. lived in it and his son, General Philip Schuyler was born there in 1733.”<sup>6</sup> Members of the Staats family occupied it during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the first floor was converted to commercial use, being the site of a produce market and dry goods store for several decades. Newspaper coverage of a fire on 24 January 1853 in “the Dutch building of J. L. Staats...[which] destroyed the contents of two dry goods stores, without damaging the building very materially...” documents this continued use.<sup>7</sup> At the time of its razing, the upper floor of the wing on the back of the house was occupied by A. E. Waldbillig's German photograph studios.<sup>8</sup> The last member of the Staats family to occupy the house was John L. Staats, who died in 1874, and who had been born in the house 84 years previously. Upon his death it was said that “In the recollections of present inhabitants of this city, Mr. Staats, with his brother, kept a drug store on the corner and resided up stairs.”<sup>9</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the house was considered a local landmark by the municipal government. It was

“appropriately decorated on the Fourth” during the national centennial in 1876 at the order of the Citizen's General Committee, who arranged the city's observation of that day.<sup>10</sup> During the city's bicentennial celebration, a bronze plaque was affixed to the face of the building, detailing a version of its long history.

## Removal of half of the house

In 1789 the City of Albany initiated plans to widen Washington Street (today's South Pearl Street), then a mere alley, into a formal public way, extending the path of Pearl Street (today's North Pearl Street) south of State Street. A portion of the interest in the Schuyler-Staats property was ceded to the City of Albany in 1790, “that it will tend to enable the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City of Albany, to lay out a street, for the convenience and accommodation of the inhabitants of said City.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the sale, Lewis continued to occupy the building as a tavern. On 7 May 1798 the city chamberlain was “directed to sell the materials of the house occupied by Robert Lewis for the highest price he can obtain for the same, not less than 250 dollars, at private sale...”<sup>12</sup> Lewis died in June of 1798, his passing possibly precipitated by the stress of dealing with eviction from his home and business (he was 74 at the time).<sup>13</sup> Lewis' half of the building was razed by 6 August 1798, when Surveyor Harmanus P. Schuyler was appointed to lay out Washington Street.<sup>14</sup>

## Descriptions and images of the house

- Description of the house as originally built

A map compiled by Joel Munsell in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, generated by referring to deeds and other legal documents then available, notes the original size of the lot occupied by the house as 9 rods (which he gives as 108 feet) in width and 120 feet in depth.<sup>15</sup> In a map generated by John Bogert bearing the date 1792, Lewis' portion of the lot is described as being 33'-8" in width, and the adjacent Washington Street (today's South Pearl Street) as 11'-6" in width.<sup>16</sup> These dimensions are important to consider when attempting to reconstruct the original size of the structure before its partial removal in the 1790s, and in determining the portion of the building that remained into the era of photography. It has, since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, been assumed that the portion of the building still standing in 1887 was half of the original dwelling, or that the house was the survivor of a pair of detached houses

of equal size. An examination of the evidence demonstrates otherwise.

Today South Pearl Street is approximately 74'-8" in width (including sidewalks), but in 1892 it was approximately 65 feet wide. Using the earlier width and subtracting the width of Washington Street in 1792, we find that as much as 53'-6" of building fabric was removed in 1798. Adding this to the known width of the portion of the building which remained into the late-19th century (which was about 24'-6"), gives an estimated total width of the original building as 78 feet, and demonstrates that the fragment that survived into the era of photography represented not one-half of the building, but, rather, just under a third of the original structure. This figure may be off a bit, given that the street may have been expanded to the west after the removal of the 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings at that corner in 1841, but there is no indication in the historical record of such an alteration in street width and this estimate is probably close to accurate.

Fig. 2 – Detail of a now-unlocated painting of the Coeymans house, showing it before late-18th century alterations. Reproduced in Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776* (New York: Payson and Clarke Ltd, 1929), 9.

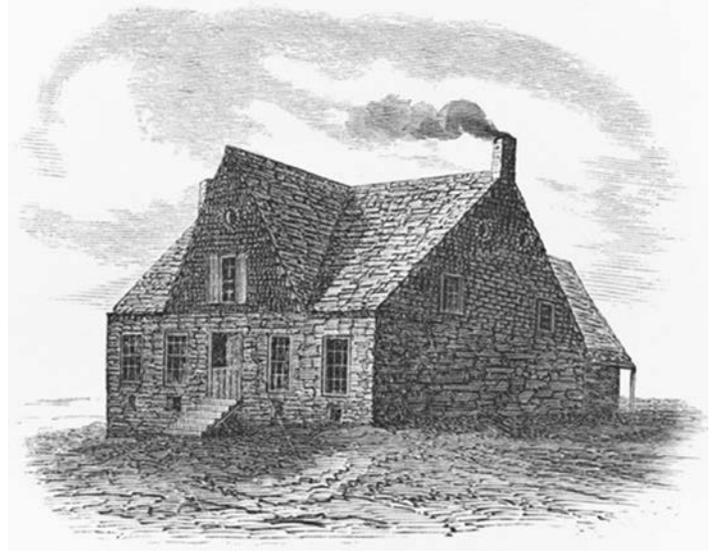
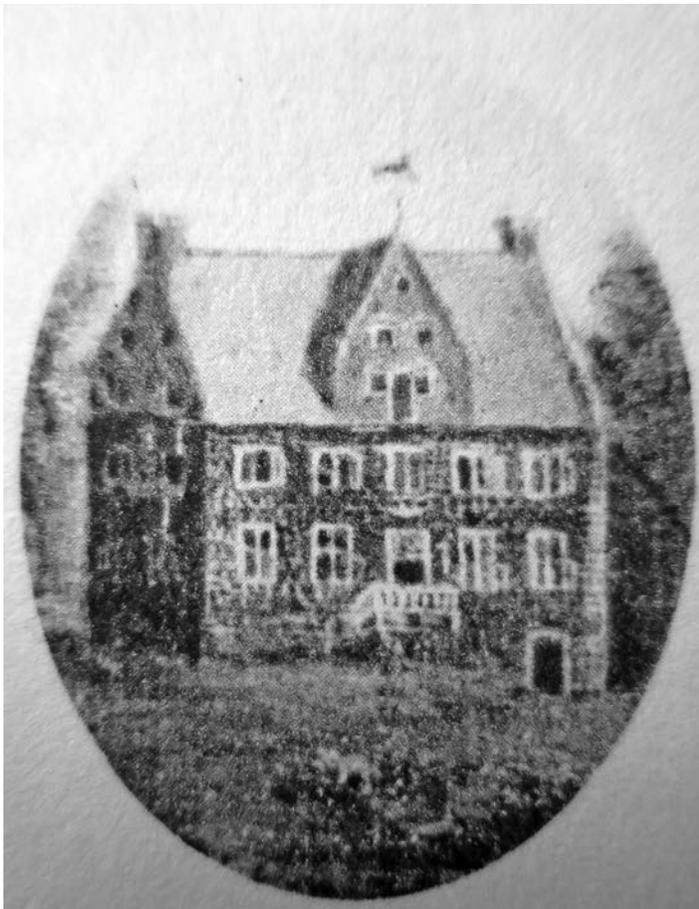


Fig. 3 – Engraved view of “Coeymans Castle,” formerly in Coeymans, Albany County. A stone house with stone cross-gable featuring brick vlechtingen, this dwelling was razed in the early 19th century (Private collection).

The earliest known image which is believed to include a depiction of the house dates to 1789 (*Fig. 1*). In this engraving, the Schuyler-Staats house is seen at left, in something close to its original form. Identification of this image as representing the south side of State Street has heretofore eluded scholars, who have perhaps been misled by the odd graphic conventions used by the artist, including an unusual depiction of the gambrel roof on the Stevenson house (second from left), and the out-of-scale representation of the Wendell house immediately to the left of it. This image also depicts the date irons on the Schuyler-Staats house as reading “1690” instead of the more popularly-held “1667” which was painted on the gable end of the building during much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The source of the 1667 date is likely to have been deeds, the above-cited research of historian Joel Munsell, and a reminiscence of the building, quoted later on in this article. While the 1690 date may have been a fabrication on the part of the artist, it may also be true that the house was constructed later than the 1667 date commonly associated with it.

Despite these disparities, it seems likely that this image does, in fact, represent the Schuyler-Staats house, the largest dwelling the Albany built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Later on in this essay, images will be presented which depict the gable-roofed wing on the south side of the building which survived until the house was razed; its location aligns with the eastern of the two stepped gables on the State Street elevation as depicted in this illustration.

## Comparison with contemporary examples

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Schuyler-Staats house – that is, to the house seen in the 1789 image – is its two prominent stepped cross gables, lighting the third floor. Not uncommon in the Netherlands of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, several examples of the use of stepped cross-gable roofs are known to have been erected in New Netherland, both in New Amsterdam and in Albany County. The Coeymans house (c.1705), and the Coeymans Castle, both in Coeymans, Albany County, are presently the only visually documented 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century rural examples of this architectural feature in New Netherland, a feature which would become much more common in the middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Figs. 2 & 3*). A number of urban examples appear in panoramic views which depict New York City that were published in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (*Fig. 4*).

In urban contexts, the use of the cross gable dormer permitted the lighting of a third floor space on a site which was subject to hemming in by construction on either side. It is also related to the length of the building, and limits of wood building technology of the day. It would have been impractical to have constructed

a building of more than 50 feet street frontage with a gable spanning its full width. Rather, the use of dormers or gables on urban buildings whose roof ridge ran parallel to the street provided the necessary sites for doors which could be used to store and retrieve goods from the otherwise difficult to reach attic spaces, together with light and ventilation.

One other example of this type of roof form is known to have been built in Albany, the Beekman-Vanderheyden house.

## The Beekman-Vanderheyden house

Occupying a site on the west side of North Pearl Street, the Beekman-Vanderheyden house was located not far north of the Schuyler-Staats house; their occupants could easily see each other's dwellings (*Fig. 5*). It is said to have been built by Johannes Beekman in 1725, and – like so many of its period – was supposed by a later generation to have been “constructed of bricks...brought from Holland.” The house measured 50 by 20 feet (so says a 19<sup>th</sup> century source) and, according to Joel Munsell, “[a]lthough it had been somewhat modernized internally, the massive beams and braces projecting into the rooms,

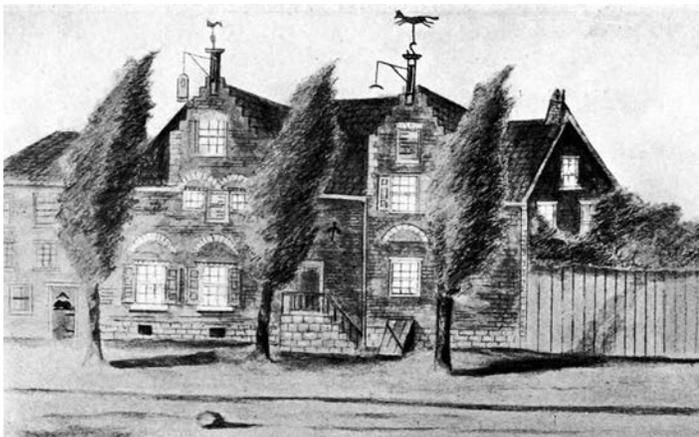
Fig. 4 – Detail from *A South Prospect of Ye Flourishing City of New York in the Province of New York in America*, 1717 (Engraved by John Harris from a drawing by William Burgis, N-YHS). Several examples of cross-gable roofs can be seen in this image, including those on a group of three adjoining structures, at left.





Fig. 5 – Detail from “View in Albany-House of the First Dutch Governors” (Lithographed by Tierpenne from a drawing by Jacques Millbert, c. 1819, and published in *Amérique Septentrionale* by de Bove and Noël aîné & Cie, 1829). This view was taken standing in front of the Schuyler-Staats house, looking north. The Beekman-Vanderheyden house can be seen in the center of this detail.

Fig. 6 – View looking west-southwest of the Beekman-Vanderheyden house. This watercolor, probably by Dr. P. Ten Eyck and the basis of an engraved view by Alexander Anderson (published in the *Albany Citizen's Advertiser and General Directory 1834-35*) was reproduced in a 1903 edition of *Memoirs of An American Lady* by Anne Grant. The present whereabouts of this painting, which depicts the building while it was still standing, are unknown. Anchor irons, securing the brick face of the house to its wood frame, can clearly be seen.



the ancient wainscoting and the iron figures in the gable ends, carried the mind back to days of old.” The house was described by Washington Irving, having been used by him in *Bracebridge Hall* as the model for the setting of that novel. Contemporaries knew it, perhaps ironically, as the “Vanderheyden Palace.” After its removal in 1833, the weather vane prominently seen in views of the building was installed at Irving’s house *Sunny Side*.<sup>17</sup> A second vane – possibly also from this house – was given by Irving to the St. Nicholas Society in New York. In the form of a gilded cock, it was used in a formal dinner of that group in 1877.<sup>18</sup>

The Beekman-Vanderheyden house was actually a wood-frame structure with a brick veneer on its east-facing street front. Other illustrations of the house, created previous to its removal, clearly depict the north elevation as covered with clapboards. Although only of one story in height, the house featured a pair of stepped gable dormers, tall enough to warrant two tiers of fenestration. The upper windows apparently lit the attic (*Fig. 6*). The form of the house is sufficiently different from that illustrated in the 1789 engraving to make it clear that that illustration was not an attempt to represent this house.

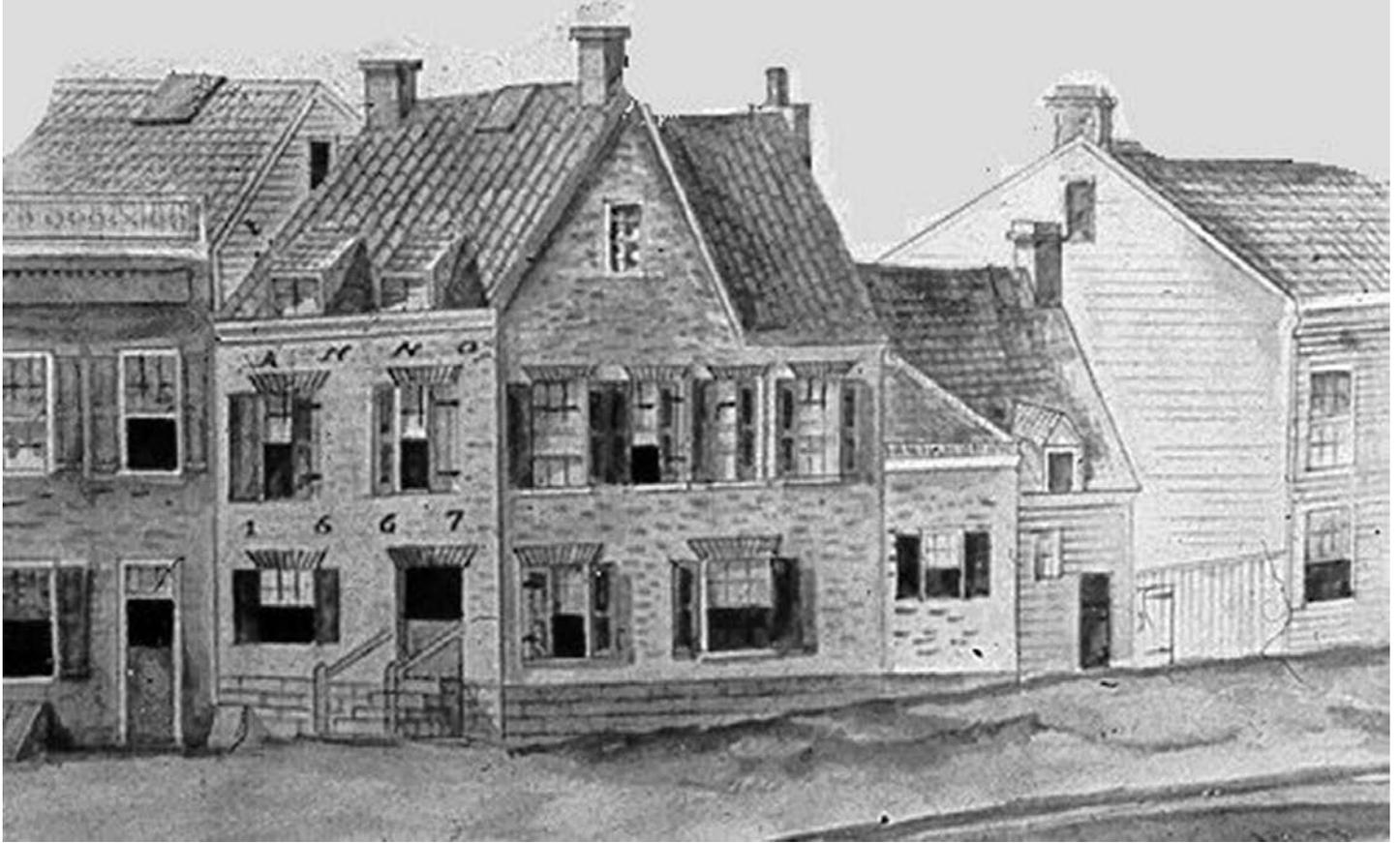


Fig. 7 – Detail from a copy photograph, taken c. 1900 by Augustus Pruyn, of a now-unlocated watercolor view of the Schuyler-Staats house, dating to c. 1830-40 (Augustus Pruyn Collection, New York State Museum, Albany, NY).

### Nineteenth century views and descriptions of the Schuyler-Staats house

With the removal of a substantial portion of the Schuyler-Staats house, and the subsequent alterations required by that work in 1798, the building lost most of its character-defining features; when, in 1819 Milbert stood in front of it, he faced away from a house that no longer served his purpose of illustrating the “Dutchness” of the City of Albany to his intended European audience. The next-oldest image of the house depicts it after the late-18<sup>th</sup> century alterations, and can be dated to the period c.1830-40 by its context (*Fig. 7*). A woodcut engraving is the next available illustration; it was published in 1866 (*Fig. 8*).<sup>19</sup> Figure 7 appears to depict the Schuyler-Staats house with a tile roof, and the first floor had not yet been converted for commercial use. This latter alteration is first depicted in Figure 8, which shows a large awning constructed on the South Pearl Street elevation for the protection of produce. Both images show the date “1667” in irons, stretching across the façade below the second floor windows, and both depict the same additions that the building had accumulated to the south, along South Pearl Street.

Fig. 8 – Woodcut engraving, showing the Schuyler-Staats house, looking southeast (Collection W. R. Wheeler).



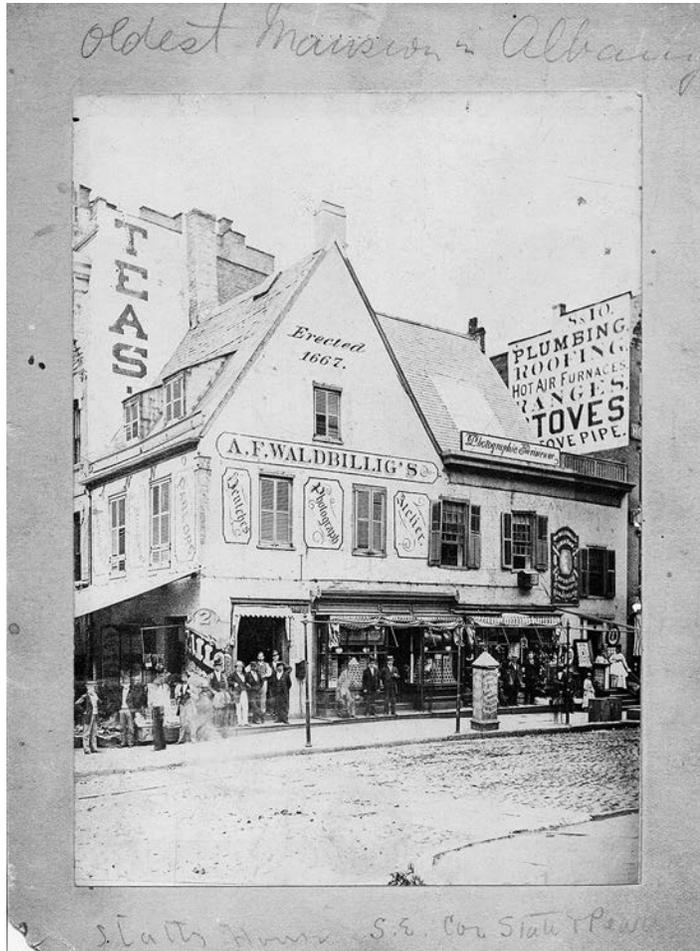


Fig. 9 – Photograph, looking southeast, c. 1872 (Collection W. R. Wheeler).

The earliest known photographs of the Schuyler-Staats house are a pair of images that date to c. 1872 (Figs. 9 & 10). These images show enough detail to make clear that the west wall of the house (as preserved at that time) was laid up in common bond, and that its bricks were of smaller size than those used in the earlier portions of the building. Window size and their division into 12-over-12 sash go together with this to begin to suggest the extent of the 1798 alterations.

Archeological investigations undertaken in South Pearl Street in the 1990s uncovered two parallel walls near the edge of the house's former site. At the time these were interpreted as belonging to two separate halves of the Schuyler-Staats house, and as proof that the buildings were a detached pair, rather than as depicted in the 1789 engraving.<sup>20</sup> It seems more probable, however, that the paired walls consisted of the internal wall between the two basements of the original structure, and the subsequent foundation and basement wall for the wall constructed on the west end of the truncated building in 1798, a bit east of

the original. That is, when the building was partially razed in 1798, a bit more than half of it was removed, necessitating the creation of an entirely new west wall since the party wall between the two halves of the houses had been removed. The surviving portion of the building was slightly wedge-shaped and had as its address 2-6 South Pearl Street during the 19th century.<sup>21</sup> The bricks, the pattern they are laid in, and the form of the windows of the west elevation all point to a late-18<sup>th</sup> century date for the west wall of the house and dormers as seen in 19th century views.

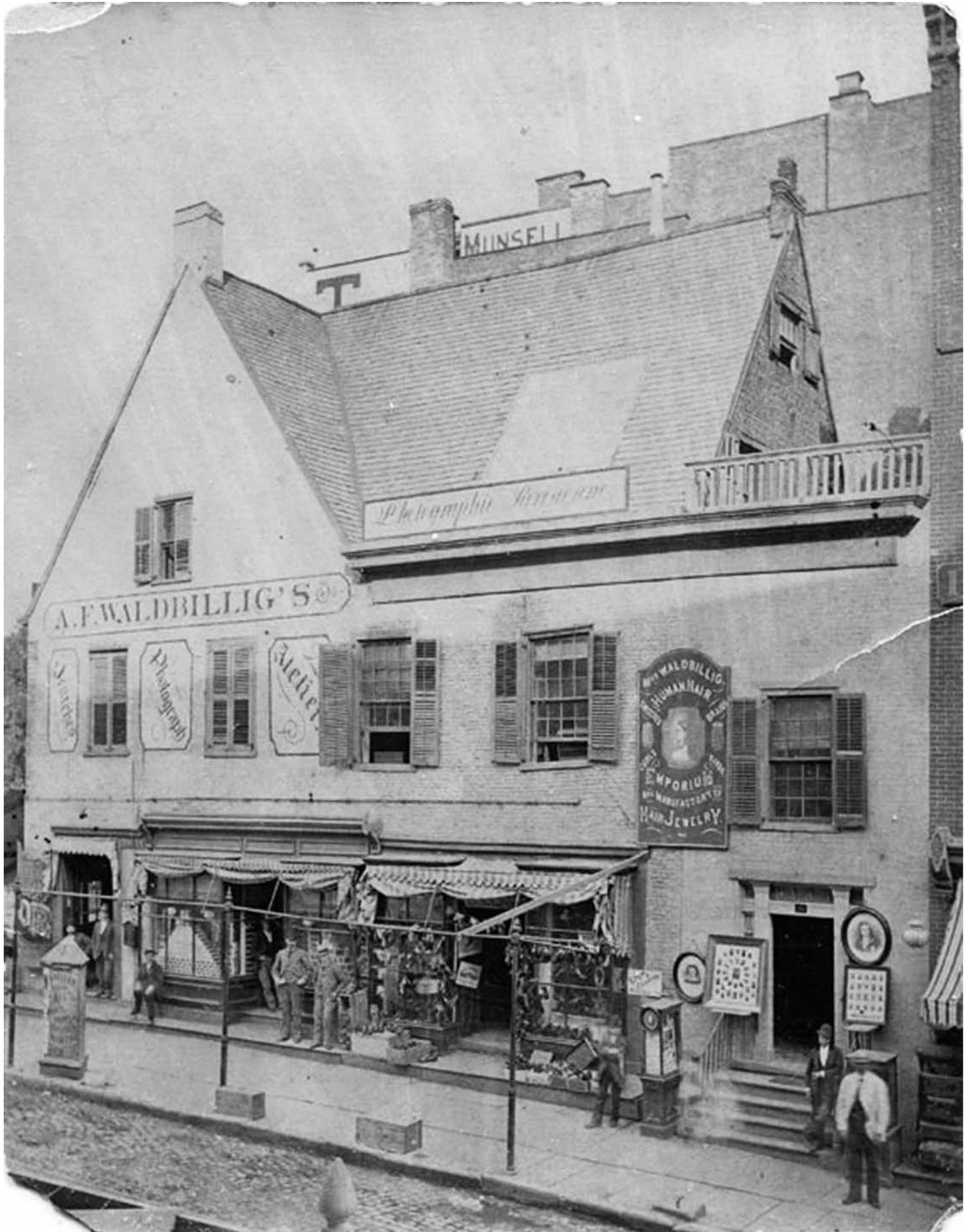
The removal of the anchor irons which displayed the date of construction for the house was noted in one account of the history of the dwelling.

There formerly ran across the front of these two houses, under the eaves, in iron letters, the words Anno Domini; and below, over the first story, the figures, also in iron, 1667. When the upper house was taken away, the word ANNO was left on the house still standing, and remains there now conspicuously; and I well remember when the figures were there also; but the owner, who was proud of them for a time, conceived the notion that the great age of his house tended to depreciate its value, and removed them.<sup>22</sup>

Some sense of the interior of the Schuyler-Staats house and its level of finish was recorded in newspapers immediately previous to its demolition. Years of having been used for commercial purposes had apparently removed much of the internal evidence of the building's advanced age, but some significant elements remained, even at that late date.

An Express reporter who inspected the interior yesterday found nearly every trace of quaintness effaced. The ground floor has long been given up to stores. The second story contains two large old-fashioned rooms adapted to the requirements of a comfortable modern home. Numerous narrow doors alone tell of the style of architecture which once prevailed. Under the neat carpet which covers the floor are broad oaken planks, rough and substantial. The one object of antiquity here is a huge leather-covered, brass-bound Dutch Bible bearing the

Fig. 10 (opposite) – Photograph, looking northeast, c. 1872 (Private Collection).



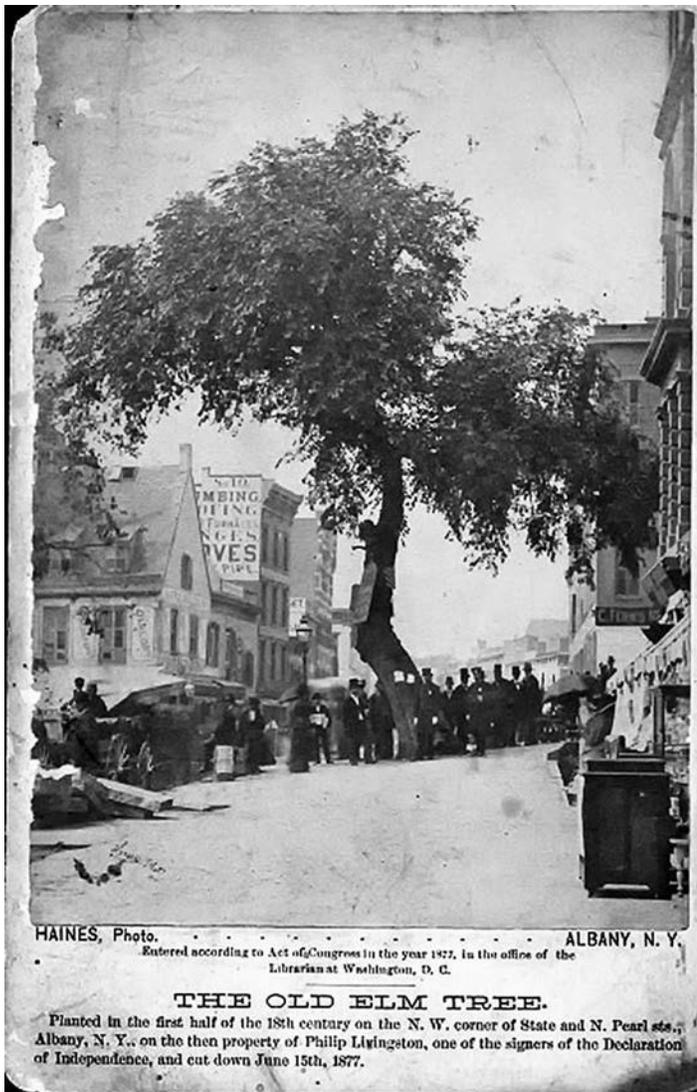


Fig. 11 – Photograph by Haines, 1877, showing the Schuyler-Staats house, at left (Private Collection).

imprint 1702, upon whose fly leaves in staid Dutch characters is a partial record of the old Staats family.

#### Under the Gables.

The third floor, reached by a winding staircase, has more the air of a country home, with its plain walls and matched board doors. Traces of a former photographic gallery which occupied the place are visible and detract much from the surroundings. On this floor, too, the rooms are smaller and the ceilings lower than in the rooms below. Through a low doorway the stairs lead up under the gable roof. Here alone the old architecture is untouched. The sharply slanting roof gives ample room for a man to stand

upright, and the old garret is full of nooks and crannies under the eaves, to which the modern inhabitants have relegated much old rubbish.

#### An Oak Staircase.

The stairway leading to the garret is of oak, and in excellent preservation. If it is a fair sample of what the ancient fittings of the interior were, then the old Staats house at one time contained some of the best handiwork of the carpenters of the day. The balustrade is black with age and dust, but the oaken posts supporting the hand-rail are neatly turned and the rail itself is beveled and smooth. Curious people have often wondered that some handsome a piece of work should exist up under the eaves, and the only satisfactory explanation is that the staircase alone remains as a substantial witness to the way in which the interior of the Staats house was finished in its palmy days.<sup>23</sup>

Given that the first floor had been converted to commercial use at an early day, it is possible that the “handsome piece of work” that was the staircase in the garret – an unusual location for such a refined piece of joinery – had been relocated there from another part of the building. Another source notes that the interior “is represented to have been elaborately finished compared with most of the houses of the time, being wainscoted and ornamented with tiles and carvings.”<sup>24</sup>

A late-19<sup>th</sup> century review of the house’s history repeated some of the stories that frequently surround some of the region’s oldest buildings, even today: “The old house was built in 1667, of brick and tiles brought from Holland. Originally its interior was gorgeous for the times, but age has effaced what modern artisan [sic] has not “improved.”<sup>25</sup>

#### Additional information gleaned from visual documentation

The brick frieze and balustrade on the west face of the house, together with renovations to an early 19th century one-bay addition at the south, date to the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A substantial one-story brick masonry gable-roofed wing with chimney at its south end was removed as part of this work. It is curious, then, that they are not shown in the view published in the 1860s; given that the image

was printed in support of an historical narrative, it is possible that an earlier drawing or recollections formed the basis of this wood engraving (*Fig. 8*).<sup>26</sup>

Photographs from the later 1870s and early 1880s further document the building's appearance and its evolution (*Figs. 9 thru 13*). Two views taken looking northeast are of particular interest, inasmuch as they document the appearance of the steep-gabled wing with corbelled finial (*Figs. 10 & 13*). They are also of high enough resolution to determine that the middle section of the wall – that forming the west wall of the wing, was laid up in Dutch cross bond – suggesting that it was part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century fabric, so that when the house was truncated the wing remained unaltered and the new west wall of the front portion of the house was aligned with it. Figure 12 allows us to see the outlines of the original square masonry openings of the paired casements of the State Street elevation, above the 19<sup>th</sup> century storefront. Also clearly seen in this view are the anchor irons; the “O” of “ANNO” can be seen to have been a later sheet iron replacement

Fig. 12 – Photograph, looking south, 1879 (Collection W. R. Wheeler).

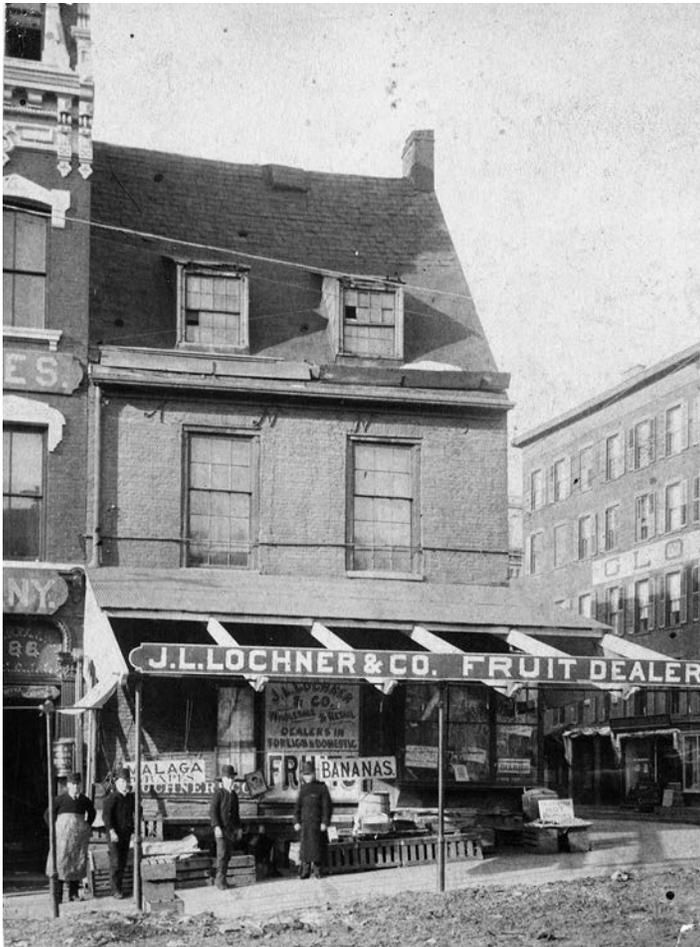


Fig. 13 – Photograph, looking northeast, c. 1880 (Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY).

– further indication that more than half of the building had been taken by the removals of 1798. A painting by D. V. De Voe, undertaken just previous to the building's removal, shows it virtually unchanged from its appearance in these photographs, but does include numerous additional details of the storefronts and their occupants.

### Final days

Impending demolition of the house was announced in December 1886, during Albany's Bicentennial year.<sup>27</sup> Sale to the bank which would thereafter occupy the building's site was hindered by dissention between the Staats family heirs – including two daughters of the last owner – and complexities of mortgages held against the property.<sup>28</sup>

Demolition of the house began on 12 June 1887; the building was “attacked by laborers”; it was said that “its entire demolition is now but the matter of a few days.” The window frames were removed as “the first step toward razing the venerable pile.”<sup>29</sup> At the time the house was being razed it was noted that “the old hand-carved oak baluster from the second story to the attic is in excellent preservation and will be saved.”<sup>30</sup> If this in fact happened, its present whereabouts are unknown. The house was “yet only partially demolished” as of 22 June.<sup>31</sup>

A photograph taken early in the process of its razing – the last known image of the house – shows it without its roof or windows (*Fig. 15*). The top of the south gable



Fig. 14 – An oil painting by D. V. DeVoe, depicting the house, 1887 (Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY, x1940.932).

wall has also been removed. This photo provides an opportunity to learn more about the original construction of the Schuyler-Staats house. A close examination reveals a few construction details.

First, it is clear from this view that the exterior walls of the Schuyler-Staats house were laid up in at least two – and more probably three – wythes of brick. This makes it the only documented case of solid brick masonry construction in the built-up portion of Albany during 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although there were a number of brick-faced houses in the community built before 1700, this is the only known example of a dwelling whose brick walls were not joined to a wood frame at that early date in the city's history. It is also clear from this view that an interior partition at the third floor level was located approximately two-thirds of the way back from the State Street elevation, and that it was made of brick. This strongly suggests the presence of analogous partitions directly below, in the basement,

first and second floors, and may be an indication that the original plan contained square front rooms and narrower back chambers, a frequently-encountered arrangement in New World Dutch houses.

The removal of the roof also revealed aspects of the framing that are interesting to note. At the right in this view (on the west side of the building), the top of the wall is seen to have been trenched with indentations that run perpendicular to its width. Even though this wall was constructed, as we have seen, in 1798, the building appears to have retained its roof covering of tiles after that date; these trenches were for the laths which were attached at right angles to the rafters and which supported the tiles. Also in this view, the inside face of the gable end wall of the south wing can be seen to have been removed down to the height just above a collar tie. In the wing and in the east wall of the front portion of the house, diagonal braces can be seen to have been located at the ends of these collar

ties. Although rarely encountered today, this framing strategy is known to have been a part of the design of some of the region's earliest buildings. Today, evidence of the use of such braces survives at the Coeymans house in Albany County, at the Van Cortlandt Mansion in the Bronx, at the Glen Sanders house in Scotia, Schenectady County, and at the stone Van Hoesen house "Salsbergen" in Greenport, Columbia County.

During the course of demolition, a brick with the name "Rettler" inscribed "in bold script" was discovered; it was taken at the time to indicate the name of the brickmaker.<sup>32</sup> This was probably the signature of Lambert Radliff, documented as the owner of a small brickyard west of today's South Pearl Street, immediately south of the house, in 1733.<sup>33</sup> It may be that Radliff provided bricks for an otherwise-undocumented alteration to the house in the early 18th century.

### Dénouement: Fetishizing History

The destruction of the building brought many of the city's citizens out to collect relics. A large number of artifacts were collected, including bricks, delft tile, and wood elements. The importance to the community of the building is demonstrated by the large number of artifacts collected during its demolition: "It was said that every family in the city carried home one of the historic bricks..."<sup>34</sup>

These relics have been put to use in various presentations of Albany's history up to the recent past. A tile from the house was included in New York State's "Colonial Loan Exhibit" at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.<sup>35</sup> In 1936 Major Bowes visited the city and displayed a brick from the house given to him by William E. Fitzsimmons, then president of the Albany Chamber of Commerce.<sup>36</sup>

In 1941, relics collected by Albert van Voast Benson, secretary of the bank which replaced the Schuyler-Staats house, were given to the Albany Institute. These included "four Dutch tiles and a brick" from the house. By that date, other items, described at that time as including "other tiles from the fire places of the Staats House and a bronze lion, one of a pair of mantle decorations in the old structure," were already in the Institute's collections.<sup>37</sup> A tile from the house, given to the Albany Public Library, was exhibited as part of an installation related to the Freedom Train, then visiting the city, in 1949, and again in 1954.<sup>38</sup>

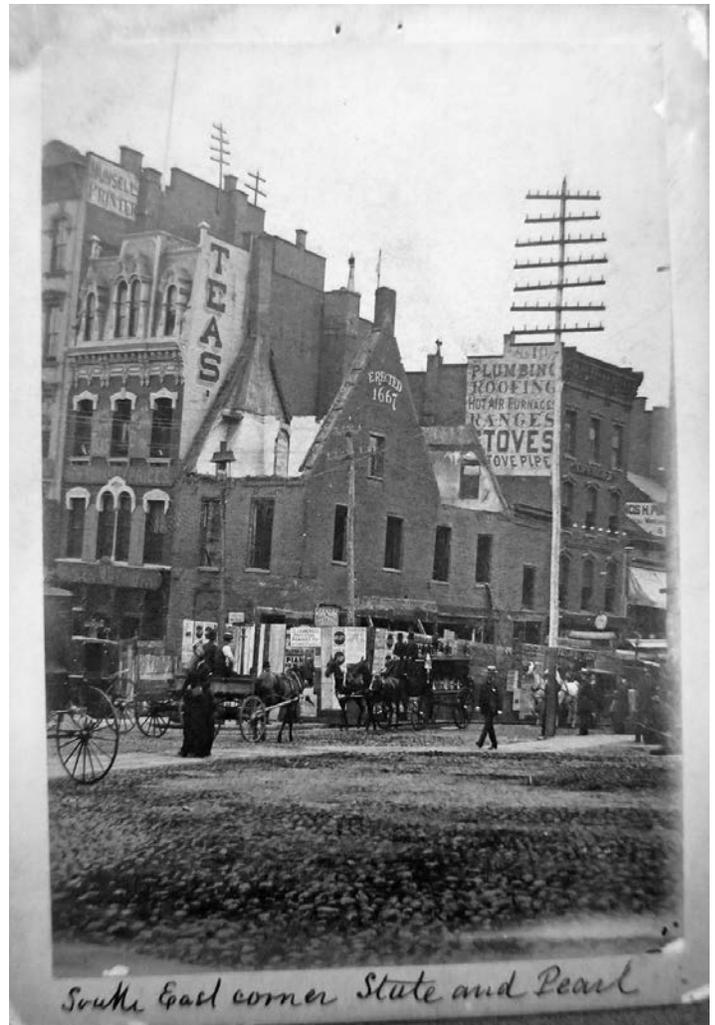


Fig. 15 – Photograph of the house during demolition, 1887 (Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY).

Fig. 16 – Detail of Figure 15, showing the roof framing.





Fig. 17 – Five tiles from the Schuyler-Staats house, mounted in a lead came frame together with a mid-19th century engraving of the house (Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY).

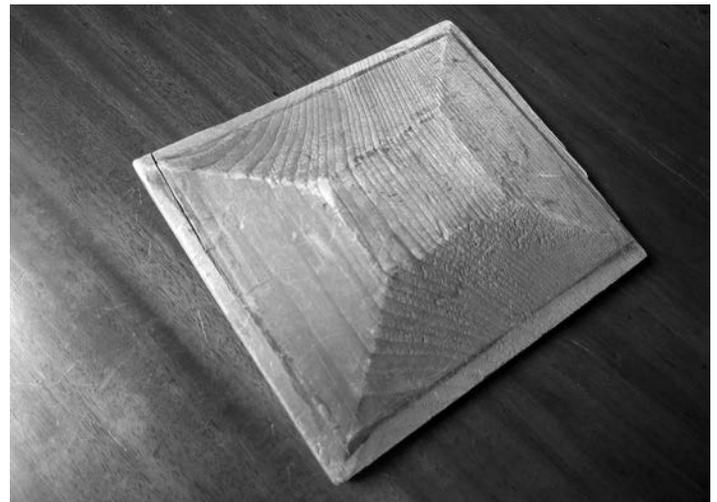
Most recently, a brick from the house, bearing a painting of the building, was exhibited at the Albany Institute in 1978.<sup>39</sup>

The brick exhibited in 1978 measures 10" x 5<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>". A second brick from the house measures 10" x 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"; both are in the collection of the Albany Institute. These bricks are the largest recorded from an early building in the region; their size provides further evidence for the early construction date of the house. Known examples from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century are a bit smaller: one from the Lansing-Yates-Pemberton house in Albany (1710) measures 9" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" x 2"; an example from the Cornelis Schermerhorn house in Kinderhook (1713) measures 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" x 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>".<sup>40</sup>

Some of the tiles collected from the building were offered by local antiquarians for sale, and were mounted into wood frames or, in one case, set within a frame of lead comes (Fig. 17). In at least two instances, tiles of late-19<sup>th</sup> century date were intermixed with grouped framings of tiles – whether by unscrupulous antique dealers of the day or later collectors is not

presently known. Today 21 tiles from the house are identified: one is located at Crailo State Historic Site, one is in the collection of the Albany Public Library (currently unlocated), six are in the collection of the

Fig. 18 – Pine panel salvaged from the Schuyler-Staats house (Collection W. R. Wheeler). On the front it is inscribed "Wood from old Staats house State & Pearl."



Schenectady County Historical Society, 12 in the collection of the Albany Institute, and one remains in a private collection.

Other fragments from the house were collected; most have been lost or misplaced over time. One that remains is a small wood panel, measuring 6 ¼" x just over 7". It has a beveled back face and many layers of paint on its front. It may have originated as part of the wainscot, mentioned above in one of the descriptions of the interior (*Fig. 18*).

The painted brick that was exhibited in 1978 and which is now part of the Albany Institute's collections was modified in a not-uncommon habit of the day, involving the memorialization of a person, event or building on an historic fragment associated with it. Whitehall, the John Bradstreet house (subject of a future article), in Albany, and the Dutch Tile house in Newcastle, Delaware were also both memorialized in this manner.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Joel Munsell. "Men and Things in Albany Two Centuries Ago," [1876], in *Transactions of the Albany Institute* 9 (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1879), 33.
- 2 Joel Munsell, "Diagram of Lots in Beverwyk" in *Collections on the History of Albany IV* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1871), 186.
- 3 Paul R. Huey, "Early Albany: buildings before 1790," in Diana S. Waite, ed., *Albany Architecture* (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press, 1993), 28.
- 4 "Old Landmarks," *The Evening Telegram* (New York), 17 March 1887, 4; Paul R. Huey, "Early Albany: buildings before 1790," in Diana S. Waite, ed., *Albany Architecture* (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press, 1993), 29.
- 5 DeWitt Schuyler. "Albany Day by Day: 8 South Pearl Street," *Times-Union* (Albany), 7 February 1929.
- 6 Edgar S. van Olinda. "Historic Buildings Razed For Commercial Advance," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 19 March 1954, 6.
- 7 Joel Munsell, comp. *Annals of Albany* 5 (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1854), 320.
- 8 Edgar S. van Olinda. "Historic Buildings Razed For Commercial Advance," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 19 March 1954, 6.
- 9 "Death of John L. Staats," *Albany Morning Express*, [14?] November 1874; "Died," *Daily Albany Argus*, 14 November 1874, 4.
- 10 "The Centennial Fourth," *Albany Evening Journal*, 27 June 1876.
- 11 *The Charter of the City of Albany; And the Laws and Ordinances, Ordained and Established by the Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the Said City, in Common Council Convened* (Albany, NY: Barber & Southwick, 1800), 142.
- 12 DeWitt Schuyler, "Albany Day by Day," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 4 September 1928, 1.
- 13 Stefan Bielski, "Robert Lewis," accessed 2 April 2018 on <https://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios//rolewis.html>.
- 14 DeWitt Schuyler, "Albany Day by Day," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 4 September 1928, 1.
- 15 Joel Munsell, "Diagram of Lots in Beverwyk" in *Collections on the History of Albany IV* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1871), 186. Modern measurements would give 9 rods as equal to 148.5 feet; the source of the disparity is unclear as Munsell appears to have been citing English measure.
- 16 Joel Munsell, comp. *The Albany Annual Register for 1850* (Albany, NY: E. H. Pease & Co., Little & Co., etc., 1850), 284.
- 17 Joel Munsell, quoted in J. W. MacMurray, "Houses in Ancient Albany County," in MacMurray, ed., *A History of the Schenectady Patent in the Dutch and English Times* (Albany, NY: n. p., 1883), 445.
- 18 "The St. Nicholas Dinner," *The Sun* [New York], 7 December 1877.
- 19 Gorham Worth, *Random Recollections of Albany*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1866) 27.
- 20 Conversation with the late Chuck Fisher, who oversaw the work. The final report of this project makes no reference to this interpretation, however it was used as the basis for a graphic reconstruction of the building by Tom Nelson, produced at that time. Charles L. Fisher. *Draft Cultural Resources Survey Report for PIN 1753.58.121, Pearl Street Reconstruction Part I: Archaeological Mitigation Report, City of Albany, New York*. Report to New York State Department of Transportation, Albany, from Cultural Resources Survey Program, New York State Museum, Albany, NY, 2004.
- 21 Griffith Morgan Hopkins. *City Atlas of Albany*, New York. Philadelphia: F. Bourquin, 1876.
- 22 Joel Munsell. "Men and Things in Albany Two Centuries Ago," [1876], in *Transactions of the Albany Institute* 9 (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1879), 33-34.
- 23 "Amid the Ruins," *Albany Sunday Express*, 23 January 1887, 5.
- 24 Joel Munsell. "Men and Things in Albany Two Centuries Ago," [1876], in *Transactions of the Albany Institute* 9 (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1879), 33-34.
- 25 "Staats Huis." *The Evening Telegram* (New York, NY), 13 June 1887, 4.
- 26 This view may have been first published as early as 1857.
- 27 "Chat by the Way," *Albany Times*, 14 December 1886.
- 28 "The Old Staats House: Latest Phase of the Litigation Over the Property," *Albany Express*, 12 March 1887; "The Romance of the Albany Staats House," *Springfield [MA] Republican*, 12 June 1887, 5, reproducing an article published in the *Chicago Times*. The resulting Circuit Court case is said to have recorded information pertaining to the interior divisions of the house in its attempt to sort out percentages of ownership. These documents have not yet been found.
- 29 "Staats Huis," *The Evening Telegram* (New York), 13 June 1887, 4; "Old Albany Landmarks," *The Evening Telegram* (New York), 14 June 1887, 2; "Albany Thirty Years Ago," *The Albany Evening Journal*, 12 June 1917, 6, quoting an edition of the paper from 30 years previous.
- 30 "Albany Thirty Years Ago," *The Albany Evening Journal*, 11 May 1917, quoting an edition of the paper from 30 years previous.
- 31 "Modernized Albany," *Troy Daily Times*, 22 June 1887.
- 32 "Pith and Point," *Albany Express*, 11 July 1887.
- 33 Paul R. Huey. "Early Albany: Buildings before 1790," in Diana S. Waite, ed., *Albany Architecture: A Guide to the City* (Albany, NY: Mount Ida Press, 1993), 47.
- 34 Edgar S. van Olinda, "Recalling With...", *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 12 November 1939, D-7.
- 35 Chauncey M. DePew et al. *Report of the Board of General Managers of the Exhibit of the State of New York at the World's Columbian Exposition* (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1894), 196.
- 36 "Albany 'Does Proud' on Bowes' Program," *The Albany Evening News*, 31 August 1936.
- 37 "Staats House Relics Given To Institute," *The Knickerbocker News* (Albany, NY), 22 May 1941, A-9.
- 38 "Display Relics Of Old Albany," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 28 October 1949, 17; "Library Has 'Cradle' Show," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 7 June 1954, 13.
- 39 Tammis Kane Groft. *The Folk Spirit of Albany* (Albany, NY: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1978), 53.
- 40 The Lansing house brick is in the collection of the Albany Institute; the Schermerhorn house still stands; measurements were recorded by Rod Blackburn.

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Bill Callahan from the Lamont-Doherty Tree Ring Lab taking a core sample from a beam in the basement kitchen on 28 November 2017.

Our member Rachel Coates has been plugging away on the historical background and construction history of the legendary Van Steenberg Tavern in Rhinebeck. (She promises that she and John Stevens will have an article for an upcoming newsletter.) In the meantime, she had a dendrochronology report prepared for the house. While the results are not entirely conclusive, the analysis is consistent with what Mr. Stevens has determined, that the stone house was erected in one build in the 1760s. John found no evidence of there having been casement windows, and he would have expected the roof to be steeper had the house been constructed any earlier. With Rachel's permission, we will add the dendro report to those we have at HVVA.org.

### Upcoming Events

**August 18** Marbletown & Kripplebush Tour, Ulster County – led by Ken Krabbenhoft

**September** Millbrook Tour, Dutchess County – led by Neil Larson

**October** Deyo-Dubois House in-depth study tour. Highland / Lloyd, Ulster County – led by Charles Glasner

**November** Octagonal House Tour, Dutchess & Columbia counties (tentative) – led by John Hamm

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