

VAN SCHAICK MANSION



VISITOR GUIDE



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

WELCOME TO THE VAN SCHAICK MANSION!

While exploring, we welcome you to use this guide to learn more about the history, people, and artifacts connected to the Van Schaick Mansion.



Download a copy of this Van Schaick Mansion Visitor Guide by scanning the QR code.

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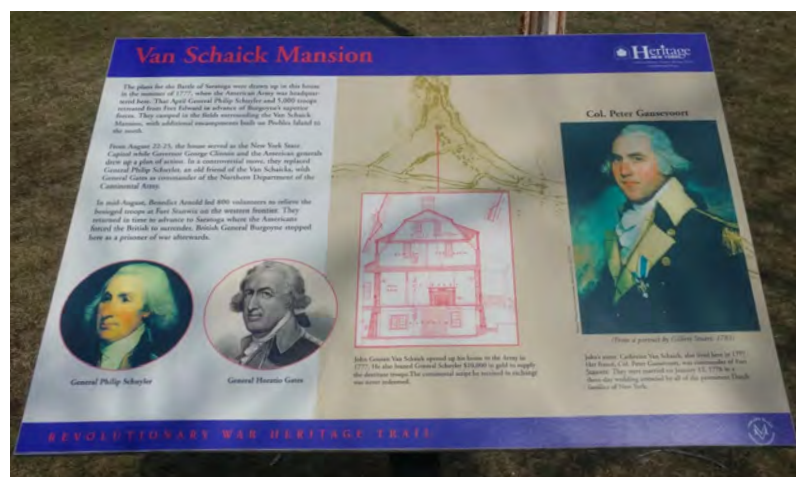
▶ VAN SCHAICK ISLAND

Before the construction of Van Schaick Mansion, the land was originally owned by the Mohicans (or Mahican), an Algonquian-speaking Native American people. In 1652, Goosen Van Schaick and his business partner Philip Pierseen Schuyler purchased the territory (approximately 8k acres) as part of the Halfmoon patent from the Mahicans, calling it “the Van Schaick Island.” In 1674, Schuyler transferred full ownership of the land to his partner, Goosen Van Schaick. The Van Schaick family held it legally for the next 200+ years.

Goosen’s son, Anthony Gossense Van Schaick, and his wife, Maria Van de Poel, inherit the property. Records indicate that a building existed on the island prior to the drafting of the will in 1737. Anthony Gossense died in 1737. His son, Anthony Antonese Van Schaick Jr., marries Anna Cuyler. Anthony Jr. spent several years expanding the house for his family, and it was completed by 1755. Anthony is not only a landowner but a brewer and owns another home in Albany. Anthony Jr. and Anna inherit the northern part of the property,

including the house. A nephew, Anthony G. Van Schaick, inherited the southern part of the land. Anthony Jr. and Anna’s daughter, Christina, married her cousin, Anthony G., further consolidating ownership of the entire island.

The Van Schaick family had a flourishing farm of orchards and livestock for many years. From 1830 to the 1890s, the family began leaving the Mansion, and portions of the property were leased to tenants and subdivided for residential expansion.



*Heritage Days at
the Van Schaick Mansion*



By the 1900s, the property and the Mansion were privately owned by various families. The last residents were Charlie and Anna Canestrari. In 2001, the Mansion was purchased by the General Peter Gansevoort Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) to ensure its historic preservation and to provide educational opportunities for the community.

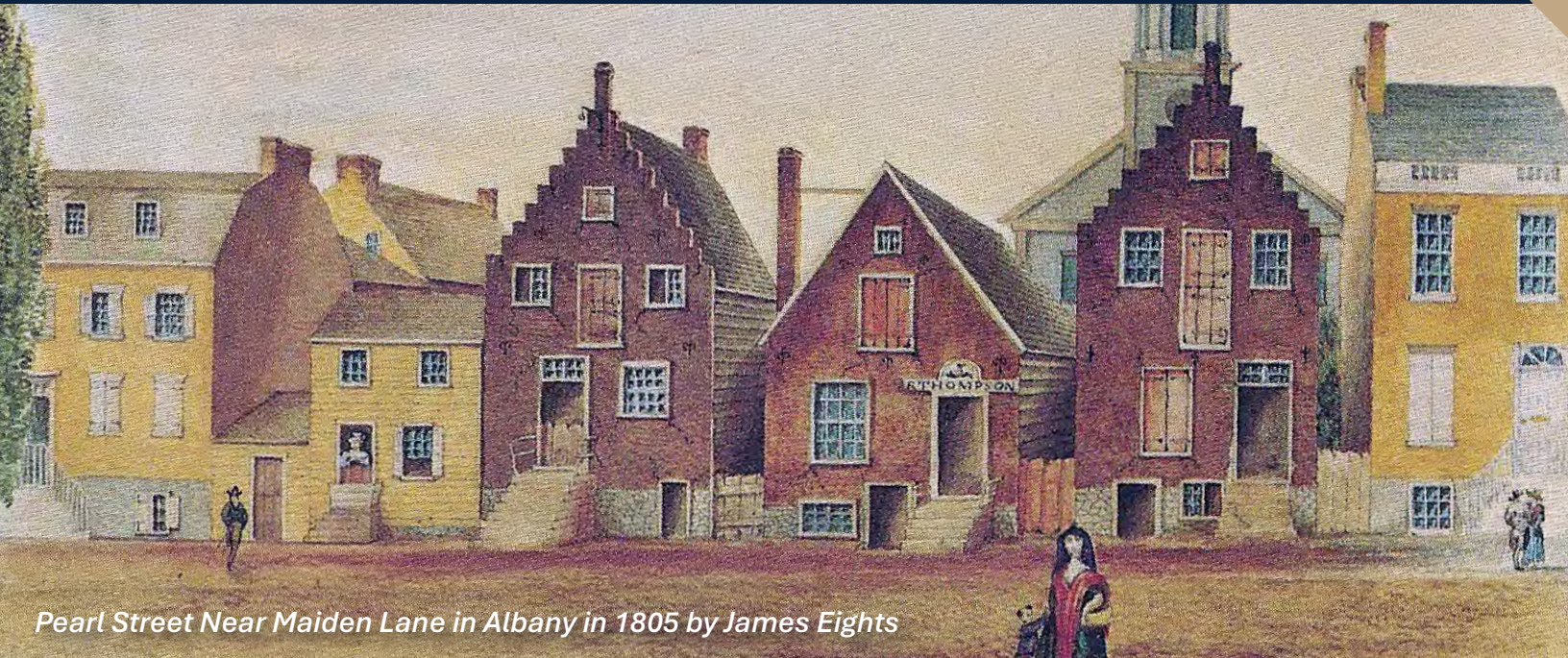
► ARCHITECTURE

Although the house appears smaller than most “mansions” of today, it is at least 2-3 times larger than typical 18th-century residential housing. Gambrel roof: This feature marks the home as English-style. The barn shape is not typical of the steep gabled roofs of the earlier Dutch house. Vlectigen: Refers to the mouse-toothed or pie-shaped wedges in the brickwork located above the windows. This feature would protect the house by absorbing moisture from the roof. The bricks are from the banks of the Hudson River, and the base of the Mansion is sandstone. There is no wooden frame. The Dutch built strong homes. The brick walls are a

single brick’s length or a double brick’s width. Over the brickwork are wrought iron supports that hold the bricks in place. They extend into the attic and attach to the beams. The Dutch built nothing for ornamentation. The brick shelf alongside the house helped deflect rain from falling onto the ground.



Side Building and Rooftop



Pearl Street Near Maiden Lane in Albany in 1805 by James Eights

▼ FIRST FLOOR

► THE ENTRANCE HALL

The main door is an original Dutch door dating back to the late 1740s. It can open in two sections. When the upper part is opened, it is convenient for the homeowner to communicate and chat with outsiders. When the lower part of the door is open, people outside can be invited in. This design can prevent strangers from entering the house at will. The hallway connects the Georgian and Federal rooms, with staircases leading upstairs and to the basement. The hallway was probably used as a dining area since the kitchen was downstairs in the basement, and prepared food was then brought upstairs. There are some noteworthy artifacts in the display case, such as part of the pulley system used outside and a windowpane allegedly signed by George Washington during his 1783 trip from Van Schaick Island to Widows Tavern (see the framed expense report hanging on the wall). There is also a picture of John G. and Anna Van Schaick, who lived at the Mansion during the Revolutionary War. They gave General Schuyler \$10k worth of gold to help support the militia during their encampment. A continental promissory note is hanging on the wall next to the display case. The Georgian stairs and banister were built off-site and assembled inside the home.



First Floor // Entrance Hall

ROOM DESCRIPTIONS

► THE GEORGIAN ROOM

The crown molding, window framing, and seats reflect the Georgian period during the 1700s. The fireplace contains a fire-back, which protects the porous brick and reflects the heat back into the room. This was built in New Jersey in the mid 1700s and is one of the few remaining in the region. This room was used by the Generals primarily, Philip Schuyler, the commander of the Northern Continental Army, and General Benedict Arnold, to plan the Battles of Saratoga in August 1777. The oil painting over the fireplace is most likely Christine Van Schaick, circa 1840s.



First Floor // Georgian Room



First Floor // Federal Room

► FEDERAL ROOM

This room was formal, and the fireplace mantel and columns reflect the Federal style. More formal events would occur in similar homes during the 1700s. This is where General Peter Gansevoort and Catherine Van Schaick (sister of John G.) were married on January 12, 1778. They had 6 children, and their daughter Maria was the mother of Herman Melville, the author of Moby-Dick. The small adjacent room was a music room and is now used as a library.



Second Floor // Sitting Room

▼ SECOND FLOOR

► SITTING ROOM

The second floor is mostly bedrooms and has the original wide-plank hardwood floors. The first room that comes into view is a sitting room containing an original walking spinning wheel, circa late 1600s. This space was used for knitting, embroidery work, and reading. The ceilings on the second floor are also exceptionally high, reflecting the generally taller stature of the Dutch people.

ROOM DESCRIPTIONS

▶ ALICE SHELPH BEDROOM

One of the bedrooms is dedicated to Alice Shelp, who is a descendant of the Van Schaicks. All items in this room are from the 1850-60s and are Van Schaick family furnishings, clothes, dolls, and photographs of family members. The coverlets on the bed were handmade by the same Albany weaver, one from the Schuyler family, one from the Van Schaicks. Dates commemorate special occasions such as weddings or the birth of children.



Second Floor // Alice Shelp Bedroom

▼ BASEMENT

The basement reflects the Mansion's role as both a working farm and a business site, not just a residence. The presence of thick walls, storage systems, and protective features shows how families needed to secure goods and maintain resources. For at least 150 years, the basement served as storage for food, cider, rum, beer, and housed the kitchen where meals were

prepared. The walls were constructed of thick bricks and stones to prevent easy breaches by enemies. Several windows at the top let sunlight filter in and allowed those inside to observe the outside world. It wasn't until later years that the Mansion was modernized, and the basement was converted into a regular storage room, with a billiards room added for recreation.



Basement Windows



(1) GOOSEN GERTSEN VAN SCHAICK was born in Holland in 1616, and made many trips between Holland and Albany throughout his life. He swore an oath as a member of the court of Albany, and at age 32, became a brewer. He was previously known as a fur trader, contracted by the Van Rensselaer family. He purchased Van Schaick Island as a partner with Philip Schuyler, but Schuyler eventually gave his shares to Van Schaick, making him the sole owner of the island. Goosen married **Annetie Lievense**, his second wife, and left her the island upon his death in 1679.

(2) ANNETIE LIEVENSE was married to **Goosen Van Schaick** and inherited Van Schaick Island after his death. She was Goosen's second wife. She remarried after his death, giving the island to Goosen's son, **Anthony**.

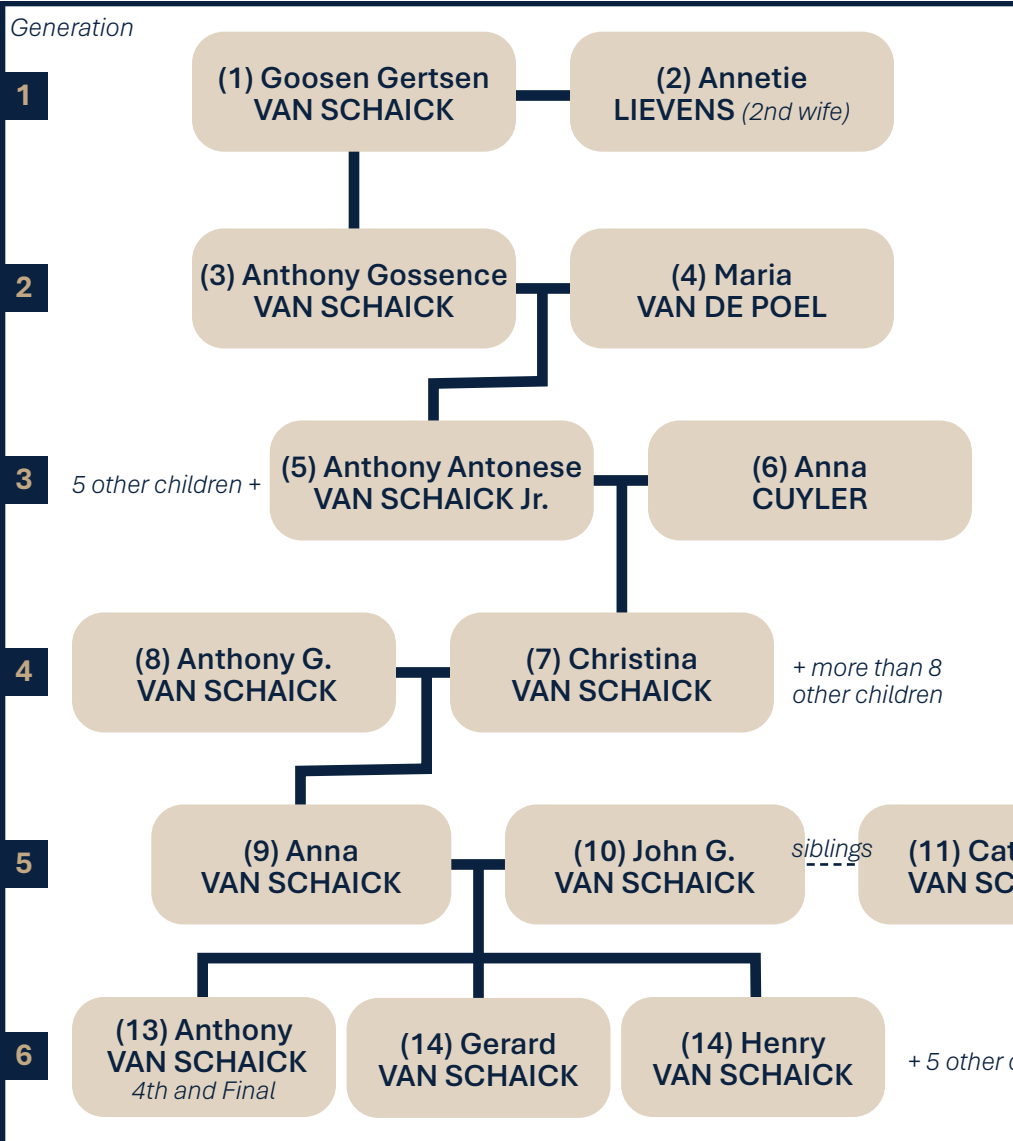
(3) ANTHONY GOSSENCE VAN SCHAICK was the son of **Goosen Van Schaick**. He inherited Van Schaick Island from his father's second wife, **Annetie**, for the price of 550 beaver skins in the 1680s. Anthony was married to **Maria Van de Poel**, and he died in 1737.

(4) MARIA VAN DE POEL was married to **Anthony Gossence Van Schaick**. They had **Anthony Antonese Van Schaick Jr.** and 5 other children.

(5) ANTHONY ANTONESE VAN SCHAICK JR. was the son of **Anthony** and **Maria**. He married **Anna Cuyler** in 1712. He is the Van Schaick who constructed the Mansion that remains today. He was an avid brewer and had an additional home in the Albany area. Anthony and Anna inherited the northern part of Van Schaick Island. The marriage of their daughter, Christina, to her cousin consolidated the ownership of the whole island.

(6) ANNA CUYLER married **Anthony Gossence Van Schaick**. They had **Anthony Antonese, Van Schaick Jr.**, and 5 other children.

(7) CHRISTINA VAN SCHAICK was the daughter of **Anthony Jr.** and **Anna Cuyler**. She married her 1st cousin, **Anthony G. Van Schaick**, and they had a daughter, **Anna Van Schaick**. Christina was left with ownership of Van Schaick Island after her husband's death, and she eventually transferred it to their daughter, **Anna**. Christina died in 1809.



THE VAN SCHAICK FAMILY

(8) ANTHONY G. VAN SCHAICK was the nephew of **Anthony Jr.** and **Anna Cuyler**, and was a 1st cousin of **Christina Van Schaick**, whom he married. Anthony G. had inherited the southern part of Van Schaick Island, so his marriage to Christina Van Schaick consolidated the ownership of the island. Anthony G. died in 1782, and he then transferred the ownership of the island to his daughter, Anna.

(9) ANNA VAN SCHAICK was the daughter of **Christina** and **Anthony G.** She married her 1st cousin, **John G. Van Schaick**. They had the 4th and last Anthony Van Schaick, and 7 other children. She was left with ownership of Van Schaick Island by her mother, but eventually transferred to her son, Anthony. Anna died in 1815.

(10) JOHN G. VAN SCHAICK was a 1st cousin and husband of Anna Van Schaick. John and Anna lived in the Van Schaick Mansion during the Revolutionary War. John G. lived until he was 80 and is believed to have been cared for when he was older by a formerly enslaved couple. He died in 1828.

(11) CATHERINE VAN SCHAICK was the sister of John G. Van Schaick. She fell in love with and eventually married General Peter Gansevoort in 1778. Catherine and Peter were married in the Federal Room of the Van Schaick Mansion.

(12) GENERAL PETER GANSEVOORT - find information about him in the historical figures section.

(13) ANTHONY VAN SCHAICK (the 4th and final Anthony) was the son of John G. and Anna Van Schaick. He died in 1822.

(14) GERARD AND HENRY VAN SCHAICK were two of the sons of John G. and Anna Van Schaick; they were also Anthony Van Schaick's brothers. Gerard and Henry were members of the 6th generation of Van Schaicks to live on the Island, and they took ownership of the property after their brother, Anthony, died.



*Christina Van Schaick,
granddaughter of
John G. and Anna Van Schaick*

NEW YORK STATE

The Dutch came to the New World in waves, driven by a mix of commercial ambition, religious conflict, and economic hardship. After breaking away from Spain, the Dutch Republic quickly became a force in the race for Atlantic colonies and wealth. **The first colonists arrived in 1624, running a small trading post at Fort Orange in present-day Albany, New York,** on the upper Hudson River. A year later, a second stronghold, Fort Amsterdam, was established on the southern tip of Manhattan Island. In the 55 years that followed, the Dutch colony attracted immigrants from all over Europe as it developed socially, politically, and economically.

Dutch immigration to early New York centered on trade, as seen by the artifacts in the Van Schaick Mansion. The Dutch West India Company pushed settlement to expand commerce and control trade routes¹. Seventeenth-century Dutch records² show how much colonial daily life revolved around trade, land deals, and negotiations with Indigenous nations like the Mohawks and Mahicans. The Dutch didn't leave a clear record of strong loyalty to either the British or the French. Their priorities were mostly economic, with neutrality to their advantage. Much of the region's political structure, legal ideas, and even neighborhood layout can be traced to Dutch practices³.

Location names in New York come straight from Dutch origins, such as Brooklyn (Breukelen), Harlem (Haarlem), Wall Street (Waal Straat), and the Bowery (bouwerij)⁴.

Architectural features such as gambrel roofs and Dutch frame



The Ferry by Len Tantilillo // Dutch settlers cross the Hudson River, 1643

houses came, seen in the Wyckoff House, the oldest surviving Dutch home in the country built in 1652⁵.

The Dutch West India Company and settlers were involved in the slave trade as early as 1626 to build infrastructure, farmland, and support the fur trade. Enslaved Africans were foundational to the development of New Netherland (now Albany and New York City). Families of similar stature to the Van Schaick Family in Albany and the Hudson–Mohawk region often relied on enslaved labor for farming, domestic work, and estate maintenance⁶. The New York State Archives preserves 17th-century Dutch records documenting enslaved Africans in Dutch households and their role in the development of early New York. Enslaved people shaped the region as much as landowners and military leaders.

DUTCH WOMEN

Women living in New Amsterdam experienced more autonomy, rights, and income than other colonial women. Dutch women maintained separate legal identities from their husbands and could own property and inherit estates. Under Dutch law, an unmar-

ried woman was treated the same as a man. Both single and married women in New Netherland found opportunities for economic independence and prosperity. Under English law, women surrendered control over their property upon marriage and could not enter contracts, write wills, or initiate legal action without their husbands' consent. Girls were awarded the chance to learn the same fundamental skills as their brothers as a right rather than a luxury—reading, writing, and arithmetic—things they would need to make successful lives.



*Colonial Dress
worn by Susan Hare,
Van Schaick Mansion Head Docent*



The Surrender of British General Burgoyne by John Trumbull // Saratoga, New York // October 17, 1777

▀ VAN SCHAICK MANSION'S ROLE

During the **American Revolutionary War** (April 1775 - September 1783), the Van Schaick Mansion in Cohoes, New York, became the center of military strategy and sacrifice in August and September of 1777. Continental Army officials were able to observe troop movements and coordinate military operations from the Mansion's strategic location on an island at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. The British Army planned to break the colonies in half by taking New York State out of the insurgency by destroying the Northern Continental Army. By controlling these areas, the patriots were able to safeguard essential supply routes and keep lines of communication open between New England and the other provinces.

The Van Schaick Mansion's unique history captures both regional and worldwide aspects of the American Revolutionary War. It played a crucial role in preparing for major military campaigns, including the Battles of Saratoga. Following the success of the Saratoga Campaign, the colonies secured international backing from France, which ultimately influenced the course of American freedom. The contributions of the Van Schaick family, the leadership displayed within its walls, and the sacrifices of the community serve as examples of how a single place can shape both local and global history. The story of the Mansion exemplifies fortitude, strategic vision, and the interdependence of regional and international efforts to achieve independence.

▶ HISTORICAL FIGURES CONNECTED TO THE VAN SCHAICK MANSION

GEORGE WASHINGTON



George Washington was the 1st President of the United States, but before this he had an impressive military career. During the French and Indian War, Washington fought for the British. During the Revolutionary War, he served as the leader of the Continental Army. **After the war, he is confirmed to have been at the Van Schaick Mansion while on his inventory tour of the colonies.** During this tour, he was evaluating the standings and conditions of the colonies post war in 1783.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



Benjamin Franklin was one of the founding fathers of the United States. He served as an advisor to the colonies during the Revolutionary War and was an ambassador to France. He secured the support of different allies for colonies such as France. After the Revolution he helped draft the Constitution. **He stayed at the Van Schaick Mansion in 1776 while on his way to Canada to negotiate support for the colonies.**

BENEDICT ARNOLD



Benedict Arnold was a General for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He is known for being a traitor to the colonies, but he fought for and helped with strategies that led to the colonies' victory. **He was at Van Schaick Mansion for an extended period of time planning the Battles of Saratoga with General Philip Schuyler in the Georgian Room.**

GENERAL PHILIP SCHUYLER



Philip Schuyler served as a General for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, helped plan the Battles of Saratoga, and was an impressive spymaster for the colonies. **He was a neighbor to the Van Schaicks;** his mansion is still located in downtown Albany. Philip was of Dutch descent and married Catherine Van Rensselaer, a member of the prominent Van Rensselaer family. After the Revolution, Philip went on to serve in many different political positions.

GENERAL HORATIO GATES



Horatio Gates was a Major General for the Continental Army. He took over power of the Northern Department after General Philip Schuyler was decommissioned before the Battles of Saratoga. While he gets credit for the victory at the Battles of Saratoga and the surrendering of General Burgoyne, **he used the tactics and maneuvers planned by General Philip Schuyler and Benedict Arnold at the Van Schaick Mansion.**

GENERAL JOHN BURGOYNE



General John Burgoyne was an English General who fought for and led troops for the British during the Revolutionary War. He is most known for his defeat at the Battles of Saratoga, where he surrendered and was taken as a prisoner of war. **He was held as a prisoner in upstate New York around the area of the Van Schaick Mansion and was confirmed to have been at the Mansion at one point.** According to the docents at Schuyler Mansion, he spent most of his captivity under the watch and care of the Schuyler family.

GENERAL PETER GANSEVOORT



In 1777, Peter Gansevoort was a colonel who elected to defend Fort Stanwix against the British led by General St. Leger who planned to advance east to attack the Northern Continental Army in Albany. The British had surrounded Fort Stanwix, but the siege was lifted on August 22 with the help of General Benedict Arnold. By then, **the troops encamped at the Van Schaick Mansion were on their way to Bemis Heights and Freeman's Farm for the Battles of Saratoga.** John Adams noted: *"Gansevoort has proven that it is possible to hold a fort."* **He is the namesake of the Daughters of the American Revolution chapter that owns the Van Schaick Mansion. He married Catherine Van Schaick, the sister of John G. Van Schaick.**





Side of Mansion Brick Construction

EXTERIOR BRICK WALLS

The Van Schaick Mansion's exterior brick walls were rumored to have been built with bricks brought from the Dutch, but in fact, they were constructed with materials from the United States.

HERMAN MELVILLE

Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*, was the grandson of General Peter Gansevoort and Catherine Van Schaick.

GIFTS OF GOLD

In the early stages of the American Revolutionary War, due to shortages of military supplies, food, and medical equipment, John and Anna Van Schaick, the owners of the Van Schaick Mansion, donated \$10,000 in gold as military funds, which is about 1.3 million dollars today.



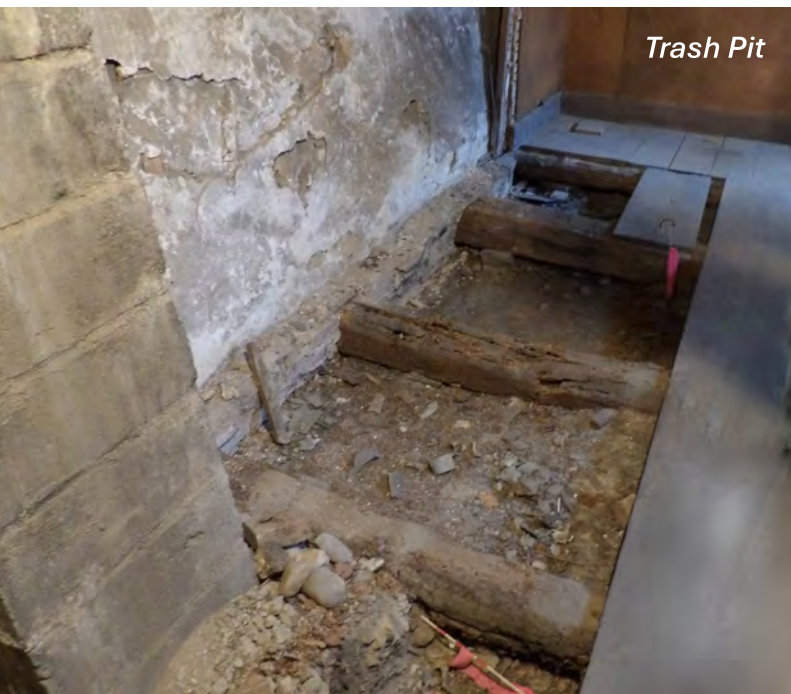
Herman Melville

PRISONERS OF WAR?

The windows in the basement of the Mansion were all equipped with iron bars, leading outsiders to believe that the basement may have held prisoners of war. The iron bars were actually intended to defend against external enemies or large wild animals.

FAMILY CEMETERY

For many years, it was believed that 24 family members were buried in the family plot based on older cemetery records. However, recent archaeological work using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) has revealed that over 50 people are buried in the cemetery, and the headstones do not all align with the remains.



Trash Pit

TRASH PIT

Archaeologists discovered an area in the outside corner of the Mansion's basement, thought to contain valuable items. However, after further investigation, they discovered that these were simply kitchen scraps, broken dishware, and leftover garbage from large family gatherings or parties.

MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

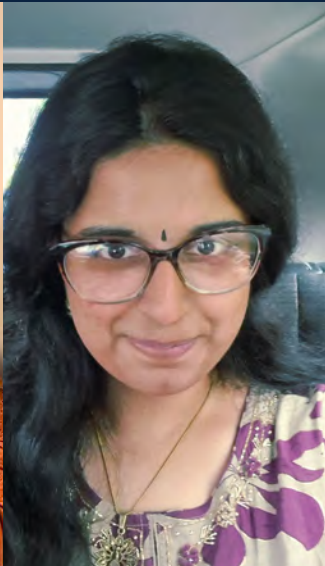
During the Revolutionary War, the Mansion served as a military headquarters, and some officers slept inside rather than in tents. To make the officers more comfortable, John and Anna offered their bedrooms and moved into the Mansion's attic.



Suechin Chang



Isabella Riley



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Sandra Ashionye Uzuh



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STUDENT RESEARCH TEAM

The student research team includes Suechin Chang, Isabella Riley, Ardra Prajesh, Sandra Ashionye Uzuh, and Prajeeth Rangamudri.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF THE CAPITAL REGION

This project was led by Beth Wales, Executive Director of the International Center of the Capital Region (ICCR), with support from Christine Guerin, ICCR Board President and a member of the General Peter Gansevoort Chapter, NSDAR (National Society Daughters of the American Revolution).



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GENERAL PETER GANSEVOORT CHAPTER, NSDAR (NATIONAL SOCIETY DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION)

The General Peter Gansevoort Chapter, NSDAR, which has owned and operated the historic Van Schaick Mansion in Cohoes, New York, since 2001, provided student researchers with access to photograph and record the site's history. The Mansion's history was narrated by Head Docent Susan Hare.





Children from Van Schaick Elementary School

The Van Schaick Mansion Visitor Guide is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and administered by Global Ties U.S. to member organizations of the Global Ties Network.



**International Visitor
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