

This Week in Saratoga County History

1689 - A Look at Early Settlement and War at Saratoga

Submitted by Sean Kelleher August 13, 2020

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A trade good recovered from Saratoga along the Hudson River from the Saratoga NHP collection

On August 13, 1689, New York Governor Leisler wrote “Scharachtoge [Saratoga]...there are six or seven families all or most rank French papists that have their relations at Canada and I suppose settled there for some bad designe and are lesser to be trusted there in conjunctione of tyme than ever before the bad creatures amongst us gives me great occupation”.

The year 1689 was very important in the history of Saratoga. At that time, 6 or 7 French families/traders and a Dutch colonist, Bartholomeus Vrooman, established farmstead and fur trading posts at Saratoga. That year also saw the Glorious Revolution in England (which changed the monarch and more) with the accompanied Boston Revolt and New York’s Leisler’s Rebellion. It was in 1689 which started almost 100 years of intermittent warfare between Five Nations Indians, England and France.

Because of geography, Saratoga was the northern Anglo-Dutch settlement of New York’s borderland region between New France, and the Five Nations Indians. Saratoga was on the front line of an intense military and diplomatic battleground and had a central role in the illicit fur trade. The beaver fur trade was worth hundreds of thousand dollars. The New France merchants desperately needed a source for high quality English woolens which were available from Anglo-Dutch traders at Saratoga. The Anglo-Dutch traders, in turn, could access superior quality furs

hunted in the Great Lakes region or north of the St. Lawrence. These furs were desired goods all over the Atlantic world. All this trade was illegal for the English and New French authorities.

As early as 1689, there was “French that live towards Sarachtoge,” where they were trading peaceably until King William’s War (1688-1697) erupted. The new, popular, New York Governor Jacob Leisler cast a suspicious eye towards the French in Saratoga including René Poupard dit Lafleur (a veteran soldier), Pierre de Garneau dit Villeroy (a French Huguenot - Protestant), and François de Lafortune. These French traders were taken before an Albany officials for questioning; some of the traders returned to New France (Lafleur) and one fully assimilated within Albany (Villeroy, became known as Pieter De Garmo).

Bartel (or Bartholomeus) Vrooman (or Vroman), seeing the opportunity to trade is credited as having been one of the first settlers at Saratoga^[i]. Vrooman was born in Leiden, Holland. Bart Vrooman, approximately twenty-six years old in 1686, married Cornelia Jansz Helmer of Albany and established a farmstead and trading post at Saratoga. In September 1689, it was reported that war reached Saratoga, “three People should be kild at Bartel Vromans at Sarachtoge by ye Indians.” Albany responded by making “a fort about ye house of Bartel Vroman at Sarachtoge,” and dispatching a small garrison of 12 men and some Indians of “Skachkook” [Schaghticoke]^[ii]. These soldiers stationed at the Vrooman farmstead to protect the various families in the area.

After the raid, The Vrooman family moved to Schenectady, where his father still lived. Their choice was a fateful one. On February 8, 1690, a French force (over 4,000 Canadians and Indians) was able to avoid the Saratoga garrison and strike Schenectady without warning. Schenectady was destroyed and the French and their Indian allies killed 60 people including Bartholomeus Vrooman and his father, Hendrik Vrooman.

1689 is a window into the story of Saratoga. Saratoga as a unique place in the colonial history of New York and the Atlantic world. When Saratoga’s colonial history is viewed through this window the massacre of 1745^[iii] and 1777 campaign take on additional meaning and context.

^[i] In 1684, Royal Governor Thomas Dongan issued the Saratoga Patent. The land patentees were Colonel Peiter Schuyler, Robert Livingston, Dirck Wessels, Esq., Jan Jan Bleecker, Esq., Johannes Schuyler, Esq., and Cornelius Van Dyck. The land patent was six square miles (170,000 acres) on both sides of the Hudson River. The original tax of twenty bushels of wheat paid annually to the Crown in return for ownership of good alluvial farmland, rushing creeks to power mills, access to a good transportation route to the Atlantic world and the fur trade with New France. After 1690, the next account of a Saratoga settlement is 1702.

^[ii] The Schaghticoke Indian refuge community was located near Saratoga. on east side of the Hudson River (modern Rensselaer County). in the Hoosick River valley. The community was made up of Mahicans and Algonquian bands (Woronocos and Pojassicks displaced by the New England colonies – King Phillip’s War). The Schaghticokes Indians provided security and soldiers to Anglo-Dutch in the Albany area.

^[iii] Lieutenant Paul Marin de La Malque’s (French and Five Nations Indians) 1745 expedition destroyed Saratoga, killing a dozen colonist including Colonel Philip Schuyler (the General’s uncle) and taking 50 Anglo-Dutch and 60 African slaves as captives to New France (Canada).