

# **This Week in Saratoga County History**

## **Delving into the American Revolution with WMHT**

**Submitted by Caleb Taran November 5, 2025**

*Caleb Taran graduated from Skidmore College in May 2025 where he studied history and media/film. During college He interned with the Saratoga County Historian's Office in the summer of 2024, where he helped prepare for the 250th Anniversary of the Battle of Saratoga. He spent the summer of 2025 interning for WMHT, where he assisted with the production of local American Revolution-related content. He has accepted a position as videographer at the New York State Assembly in Albany.*



*The Battlefield at Saratoga National Historical Park*

When I decided to attend Skidmore College in April 2021, I had no idea that I was about to step into one of the deepest historical ravines in the country. Saratoga County and its surrounding areas witnessed history from the birth of the Iroquois Confederacy - which some scholars argue laid the foundations for the representative democracy we enjoy today - to the tumultuous Battles of Saratoga, which secured American Independence by convincing France that they ought to aid this small, fledgling country. In some ways, the Capital Region of New York State is the Cradle of the Nation. Throughout my time majoring in history at Skidmore and interning with the Saratoga County Historian's Office, I visited many local historical sites and museums and became accustomed to the community of history aficionados who live here, and the very important public history educational network in this region. So even upon my graduation from Skidmore, it was not yet time to leave.

For the summer following the end of my college career, I was lucky enough to land an internship with WMHT. My duties went far beyond that of a typical intern—I gained valuable control room

experience, helped to edit videos, and participated in both studio and field shoots (including one at the New York State Capitol). The historical focus of the internship, however, was working on local programming related to Ken Burns' upcoming project *The American Revolution*. The opportunity to work in such a historically important region was an exciting experience.

My specific assignment was Production Assistant and Grip on the WMHT series [Field Trip](#), which showcases interesting locations and tourist hotspots across the Capital Region. A special Revolutionary War themed episode will air on November 16, as a prequel to Part 1 of Ken Burns' *The American Revolution*. I was present for production at two locations in that film: General Phillip Schuyler's house in Albany, and the vast fields which hosted the Battle of Saratoga.

On June 24, we headed to the first of these shoots. [The Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site](#) in Albany is about as jarring an anachronism as one could possibly find. On a hill overlooking the heavily developed city of Albany, with its concrete, metal, and asphalt, is an old, stately mansion from a time long gone. The mansion, which once belonged to Phillip Schuyler, is now a museum dedicated to his life and legacy, the good and the bad. Schuyler and his wife, Catherine Van Rensselaer, were part of an almost-feudal landed elite with Dutch roots (owing back to the original colonial overlords of this area) which used to dominate the politics of New York State. It is certainly not how we think of Albany now, but there it is: a tiny island of the past situated in the middle of an ever-changing landscape.

The anachronism carries over into the inside of the building. The Schuyler Mansion was built in the 1760s, with much of it dating back to when Phillip himself was still alive. As such, the confluence of modern filmmaking technology with delicate wooden floors, lightly traversable stairs, and closed-off bedrooms must be very precisely managed.

I quickly realized that filmmaking is not always glorious. The day before the shoot, my fellow intern and I spent time drilling holes into the bottom of tennis balls. In order to prevent scuffing up the centuries-old floors, these tennis balls had to be inserted onto the bottom of the tripods' legs. There, they act as a cushion on the floor. This was one of several precautions we took to preserve the historical authenticity of the places we shot at.

Phillip Schuyler himself was a fascinating figure from the region. Although no expert, I learned a great deal about him during my internships. A wealthy member of Albany County's landed gentry, he was appointed a Major General in the Continental Army in 1775 and is more recognized for his logistical skills than his military strategy. He was the commander of the failed 1775 invasion of Canada although illness prevented him from leading the army in the field. In

1777 he led forces defending the region from Burgoyne's invasion until replaced by Horatio Gates leading up to the Battles of Saratoga.

The second major shoot I was involved in for Field Trip's American Revolution-themed episode, at the [Saratoga National Historical Park](#), took place a few weeks later on July 8. In the almost 80 degree heat, this was quite a day. After setting up some equipment to record a few brief interviews with park staff at the Visitor Center, we loaded it all up again to drive down to the actual battlefield itself. What followed were more interviews with staff, a shoot of a Fife and Drum band, and then the capturing of some B-roll footage at the end of the day. The park is absolutely beautiful, and it is difficult to think that such a serene landscape was once the site of such suffering, killing, and death. But then again, the sacrifices made at Saratoga are what led to the creation of this very country we live in today.

The Battles at Saratoga took place at a critical time in our revolutionary struggle. With the defeat of General John Burgoyne and first ever surrender of a British army, Saratoga certainly deserves the title of Turning Point of the Revolution. But it was the resulting alliance with France that eventually sealed our independence with the defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown four years later.

As excitement for Ken Burns' film on the American Revolution continues to mount, local historical education and public programming efforts are also foundational to our understanding of the story of our nation. In an era when funding for many of these institutions are at risk it is crucial that we continue to support them. Please consider donating to [WMHT](#) and the [Saratoga Battlefield](#) so they can continue their valuable work and more people like me can fall in love with this region and its history in the future.

**Sources-***Life of General Philip Schuyler, 1733–1804* by Bayard Tuckerman, 1903

[1777 Campaign](#)-Saratoga National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service) [nps.gov](#)