

## Colonel Peter Yates : part one

I have thought a lot lately about how many people there are who were extremely important to the development of the town of Schaghticoke, but are now completely forgotten and/or unknown. For me, Colonel Peter Yates was one of these people until very recently. I knew he had been the second Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany County Militia, our regiment in the American Revolution, and that he is buried in a hard-to-get-to cemetery on River Road, but not much else. I have found that Yates was a remarkable man who made a great contribution to our town.

Pieter or Peter Yates was born in Albany in 1727. He was the youngest son in a large family. His father, Christoffel was a blacksmith, son of an earlier Albany blacksmith. Not much is known about his early life, but Pieter was also a blacksmith, and lived in a house in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward. He married Sara VanAlstyne in 1749. They had seven children by 1767: Jacob, Christopher, Abraham, Maria, Cathalina, Pieterje, and Anatie. According to a brief biography by Stefan Bielinski, Pieter “performed services for the city government.” He also signed the constitution of the Albany Sons of Liberty in 1766, establishing himself as a patriot.

Pieter’s elder brother, Abraham, was a prominent citizen of Albany. He was a lawyer who became an alderman, and sheriff. During the Revolutionary War he was chairman of the Albany Committee of Correspondence. He was a delegate to the Continental Congress at the end of the war, and ended his career as mayor of Albany from 1790 to his death in 1796. I mention this to show that Pieter had great political connections.

Sometime during the 1770’s, Pieter Yates and his family moved to Schaghticoke. In Schaghticoke, Yates became a farmer, and a wealthy one at that. He rented land within the Albany Corporation Lands, Partly because of the location of Yates’ tombstone, we know his land was at the southern border of the lands, now on River Road just north of where Pinewoods Road meets it. I don’t know why, but his name doesn’t appear on the c. 1790 map of those lands. In his will, however, Yates notes that his heirs will have to pay the rent, bushels of wheat, to Albany yearly, so he definitely rented. According to Pat Booth, the Anderson home on River Road was Yates’ home. She says it is somewhat disguised by its large screened in front porch, but that entered through the Dutch front door, at the rear of the home, it retains a lot of its original features. What a beautiful view Yates and his family had from that height over the Hudson River.

To continue chronologically, Yates became Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany County Militia following the battle of Saratoga, in the fall of 1777, when John Knickerbocker gave up the position. He continued in that role until at least 1782. It’s very interesting that the first mention of Yates in his new town of Schaghticoke is as he takes over from the town’s most prominent citizen, John Knickerbocker, in probably the most important position in town, militia colonel. This says a lot about the character and presence of Yates. I also find it interesting that he and his wife moved at such an uncertain time, with the war going on, leaving a comfortable existence in the city for the frontier, and in middle age. I have found a mention of a Captain Peter Yates in the 2<sup>nd</sup> NY Regiment in 1775 and 1776, so perhaps Yates got his leadership experience there. Yates’ eldest son, Jacob, joined the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany County Militia before his father did, but he became a Lieutenant and then a Captain after his father became Colonel.

We know from Pension Papers that the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany was called out every summer during the war, mostly to help patrol the border and work on construction projects in places like Fort Edward. Yates would have been instrumental in leading those efforts. In 1780, he acted as president of a court martial of men from two other regiments who had been “delinquent”. We know that because in 1795 the New York State Legislature voted to compensate Yates for expenses he had incurred during the trial. The men, who were found guilty, should have paid the expenses, but the area where they lived was claimed by the state of Vermont, and the fines proved impossible to collect.

In the next columns, I will discuss Yates’ vital role in the border dispute between New York and Vermont, and his estate as revealed in this will. The bibliography will be at the end of the last column.

## Colonel Peter Yates: part two

In the first column about this important figure in the history of Schaghticoke, I described the early life of Peter Yates, a blacksmith born in Albany, who moved to Schaghticoke at the time of Revolution, when he was already middle-aged. He almost immediately became the Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany County Militia, succeeding the town's most prominent citizen, John Knickerbocker, in that role in late 1777. Yates rented property within the Albany Corporation lands, on River Road, and several of his grown children lived nearby. He was busy as Colonel and farmer throughout the war.

Probably the most difficult time of the war for Yates was during the second half of 1781, when Schaghticoke was embroiled in the controversy over the border of Vermont. As I mentioned in an earlier column, he received a letter from Governor Chittenden of Vermont, chastising him for daring to call out his New York State militia men in the area the Governor felt was really part of Vermont. The Governor wrote, "I must earnestly request you to desist exercising your power ..for I assure you, Sir, the Consequences will be inconvenient." Yates eloquently replied, "As an Inhabitant and a Military Officer in the State of New York to whom honor and the obligation of an Oath is sacred, I hold it my indispensable duty to Obey the orders I received....Whatever the consequences may attend my non-Compliance..., I mean to do my duty as an honest and conscientious man, and I leave it to God and Congress to decide..." In the end, there were no shots fired when Yates' militia men faced off with the insurgents from Vermont. Yates' superior, General Gansevoort, took charge, relieving Yates of having to make the decision to have to fight his countrymen. The history of the whole United States could have been quite different if Yates had either complied with the Governor of Vermont, or even joined the Vermont insurgents, or if he had ordered his militia men to open fire on the Vermonters.

We know that Yates was still busy as militia Colonel when he signed an order on May 1, 1782 requiring one of the 26 men of the "class" or group listed to report, "equipt for the field" to Saratoga. The men were members of his militia regiment in Schaghticoke, and they needed to choose one of their number to serve in the regular army, and deliver him equipped to do so.

Yates served his country, but he also prospered as a farmer. By 1800, he was one of the ten wealthiest men in town, with real estate of \$4700 and a personal estate of \$1096. In the 1790 census, he is listed with nine slaves, a tie for most slaves owned in town that year. Fortunately he left a will, and an extensive inventory of his property. His wife Sara VanAlstyne died in 1793. Yates remarried in 1796. In his will of 1807 he notes that he made provision for "my present wife" after his death when they married- a prenuptial agreement!- but he does not name her, and she is not buried in the cemetery with him.

Yates and his family also participated in the local church, the Schaghticoke Dutch Reformed. Peter and his wife Sarah appear as godparents twice in the records, the first time in March 1774 when daughter Pietertje and her husband Derick VanVechten had their son Peter baptised, and then when son Jacob and his wife Elizabeth had daughter Sarah baptised in 1779. Jacob had married Elizabeth VanDenbergh there on June 20, 1776. I was hoping the marriage of Peter to his second wife would be there as well, but it is not- perhaps an indication that she was from elsewhere.

In the next two columns, I will discuss in detail the contents of Peter Yates' will – a great insight into the possessions, both in real estate and personal effects, of a wealthy farmer of 1800. At the end I will give the bibliography for the series.

### Colonel Peter Yates of Schaghticoke: part 3

In the first two columns of this series, I outlined the biography of Peter Yates, a middle-aged immigrant to Schaghticoke from Albany at the time of the Revolution, who went on to become a prominent citizen and wealthy farmer, one of the ten wealthiest men in town in 1800. Yates died in 1807 at age 80.

In his will, Yates left nine farms or large pieces of property, divided among his three sons, three living daughters, and children of his deceased daughter. Two hundred acres purchased in Canajoharie in 1787 went to his son Christopher, and his Schaghticoke farm to his son Jacob, except for thirty acres and his new house. Son Christopher also got the farm he had bought from Nicholas Bratt, where son Abraham was living, plus 200 acres more of woodland. Son Abraham got to continue to live on the farm. Yates gave the farm where son-in-law Richard or Derick VanVechten and daughter Pieterje lived to his three sons, but the VanVechtens got to stay on there. Daughter Catharina, married to John VanAntwerp, got 212 acres in Mayfield in Montgomery County. Daughter Annatie, married to Philip Vandenburg, got half of a farm, 90 acres, in Saratoga in "Shenondehowa alias Clifton Park"; and grandson Henry (son of Abraham) 150 acres of wild lands in Montgomery County. Pieterje also got "one island" located in the Hudson near his home, where she could cut fencing material for her lifetime. Yates also provided for the children of his deceased daughter, Maria Groesbeck: Maria Ingersoll, and Catalina and Catherine Jacox. They each received 250 pounds outright, and he admonished his sons to give them money as well.

One interesting provision of the will was that Yates' sons were ordered to secure all of his accounts and writings as soon as he died, "to be carefully put together and not to give any person the libery of handling any of these papers....my writings must be locked up in my wagon chest." Son Jacob would take charge of the chest, and upon his death it was to go to one of his sons, "and not to his daughters." Wouldn't we love to know what was in that chest!?

Son Jacob was the main executor of the estate, and apparently didn't do a great job. Peter specifically noted in his will that if any of his heirs complained about its provisions, they would not receive their inheritance. After Jacob died in 1832, the heirs petitioned the Surrogate's Court, claiming that he had failed to divide Peter Yates' personal possessions among them, as specified in the will. I guess the provision against complaints wouldn't apply if the provisions of the will just weren't followed. Why Jacob didn't isn't clear, as the inventory of the estate was made in 1807, at Yates' death, with what each heir was to get clearly specified.

In the final column about Yates, I will explain the division of his personal possessions among his children, and give the bibliography for the whole series.

## Colonel Peter Yates: finale

In three previous columns, I have given the biography of Peter Yates, immigrant to Schaghticoke as a middle-aged man during the Revolution, Colonel of the 14<sup>th</sup> Albany County Militia. In the last column, I began to explain the contents of the probate records connected with his estate after his death in 1807. He divided nine pieces of property among his six children and children of his deceased daughter.

Each child got also received a variety of his or her father's personal possessions. Christopher got Windsor chairs, an umbrella, a pair of gold sleeve button, a silver tankard worth \$50, \$50 in cash, and a close stool- this would be an adult potty chair- looking like a regular wooden arm chair, but with space for a chamber pot underneath. Son Jacob got more Windsor chairs, a desk, five pictures, one sugar tong, six tablespoons, and \$50 in cash. Abraham got considerably more, including six fiddle back chairs, a pair of brass andirons, a silver watch, six tablespoons, and \$170 in cash. He and Jacob each got half of a wagon. Hopefully they were good at sharing.

Daughter Pieterje got a looking glass, a bed and its clothes, a bedstead, one two-year old colt, fifty saw logs, three silver spoons, and \$50 in cash. A bed was what we would call a mattress. Feather beds and their coverings were regularly the most valuable items in inventories at this time. Catalina got six highbacked chairs, another bed and bedding, three pewter dishes, one silver ½ pint cup, one mare, one milk cow, and \$50 in cash. The children of deceased daughter Maria Groesbeck got very little, including one straw bed, one blanket, two candlesticks, and \$50 in cash. Daughter Annatie got another looking glass, another bed, eight cups and saucers, six blue plates, and \$50 in cash. Each heir got a bushel of salt, valued at 67 and ½ cents.

The inventory divided the farm animals and tools among the three sons. Jacob and Abraham shared five horses, four sleighs, blacksmith and carpenter tools, eleven cows, four oxen, fifteen pigs, 19 sheep, three wagons, plows, harness, and a fanning mill. Christopher got "one long Holland gun" worth \$12, a variety of other tools, two swords, worth \$42, and the harvested crops- wheat, rye, oats, corn, flax, and hay.

A separate sheet distributes the slaves: Christopher got Tom, worth \$275; Jacob got Jack, \$275, and Fanny, \$190. Abraham got Dave, \$275 and Pegg, \$205. Petertje got Ann, \$140, and Catalina got Bob, \$125. An addendum to the inventory lists items that had been overlooked, including "a Negro boy named Sam", worth \$50. The will listed another Negro boy named Daffron, who was to go to Abraham. The slaves were by far the most valuable "belongings" in the estate.

Peter Yates' will also sets aside two acres of land from his farm "for my burial yard at the place where my first wife is buried...at Schaghticoke...to remain for a burial yard for my family forever." This cemetery is located behind the Anderson farm on River Road, next to a gravel bank. It contains about 90 known burials, 22 of them with the surname Yates. The earliest is Peter's wife Sarah, in 1793. The latest is Maria Yates Conklin, who died in 1874. Yates' three sons are all buried there.

Peter Yates seems to me to be an example of a quintessential American. Born in modest means, he elevated himself to be one of the wealthiest men in town. He was an outspoken patriot, who served his country in difficult times for many years. Moving to a new place in middle age, he thrust himself into the thick of service. He took chances- investing in land in several counties- and it paid off. He tried hard to provide for his children after his death. I would love to know if any of his possessions survive.

Bibliography: Will and probate records of Peter Yates

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