

## **Ash Burl Bowl**

**Hand-hewn, c. 1710**

**Made by a Native American, probably Mohawk woman;  
belonged to Johannes Schuyler of the Schuyler Family of Albany and  
Saratoga.**

***SARA 4330***

This large bowl was hand-hewn from an ash burl, or knot. In 18<sup>th</sup> century inventories and lists, this type of bowl was commonly called a “knot” or “knott” bowl. The tight grain structure of the burl made it a good material for vessels used in food preparation. Because of its large size and oval shape, this type of bowl would have been used for making bread. But this was no common bread bowl --- the hand-carved inscription on the bottom of the bowl indicates another purpose: one of commemoration of an event.



Johannes Schuyler  
Attributed to John Watson  
Oil on canvas, c. 1730  
Collection of Historic Cherry Hill, #HCH 135

### **Who was “JS”?**

The initials “JS” stand for Johannes (*yo-HON-ness*) Schuyler (1668-1747), accomplished fur trader, politician, business and military man, land owner and a “Commissioner of Indian Affairs” in New York. The younger brother of Pieter Schuyler, Johannes was also a leading figure in Albany and in New York from the 1680s well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Schuylers were among the original landholders in the Saratoga Patent, a large grant of land in this area made in 1683. Through his marriage in 1695 to Elsie Staats Wendell, widow of Johannes Wendell, Johannes Schuyler gained ownership of Lot 4 of the Saratoga Patent, the land south of Fish Creek that would become known as the “Schuyler Estate”—the land you are standing on today. Johannes

Schuyler would hold this property until his death in 1747 – land that was the site of forts and battlefields, especially during King George’s War in the 1740s.

### **What about the date, “1710”**

The year 1710 fell in the midst of a colonial war known as “Queen Anne’s War”, considered one of a series of French and Indian Wars in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1702 and 1713, the English colonies fought against the French and Indians based in Canada. New England was repeatedly targeted by raiding forces, the most famous of which was the raid on Deerfield in 1704. In 1710, Johannes Schuyler was one of New York’s Indian Commissioners – a person appointed specifically to deal with matters related to Native American relations, negotiations and treaties. He was also a member of the Colonial Assembly beginning in September 1710. From August 7-20, 1710, there were twelve separate Indian conferences held in Albany between New York’s Governor (Hunter), the Indian Commissioners and other officials, and sachems from the Five Nations, the Oneidas, the River Indians (Mohicans) and the Schaghticokes. It is known that Johannes Schuyler attended the conferences as one of New York’s Indian Commissioners. Official records of the conferences relate the establishment of policy, expectations and behaviors from both New York colonial government and Native Americans. At each meeting, and to seal each agreement, various gifts were given by one group to the other. Although it was not recorded that this bowl was a specific gift of the 1710 conferences, its Native American origin and Schuyler’s inscription of his initials and the date may well indicate that he acquired the bowl during the August 1710 negotiations during his service as an Indian Commissioner.

### **What is this bowl made from?**

This bowl is commonly known as “treen” ware. *Treen* is an old English word meaning "from the tree." Treen refers to small utilitarian objects of wood such as carved wooden spoons, bowls, snuffboxes, trenchers (plates), and mortars. *Burl treen* refers to treen made from the burl, which is a knotty outgrowth of a tree. By the time European settlers arrived in this area, Native Americans had already been using burls to make bowls and ladles. They were master wood workers. The burl would be cut from a tree and the interior burned out with hot coals, scraped, and burned some more. This was repeated until a sufficient cavity was formed. The bowl would be shaped and smoothed further using a combination of smaller implements.

### **Who made this bowl?**

This bowl is obviously hand-made and its shape is very similar to other identified Iroquois bowls. The production of burl bowls and wares was done by Native American women. We will never know the identity of that person, but she was a highly-skilled woodworker.

### **Who used this bowl?**

Beyond the ceremonial significance of this bowl, it was very likely used in several Schuyler family kitchens, probably here at the Schuyler’s Saratoga Estate or in Albany. Johannes

Schuyler was the father of John, and the grandfather of General Philip Schuyler. General Schuyler's son, John Bradstreet Schuyler, and his grandson, Philip Schuyler II, also lived at Saratoga. Each of these Schuyler families would have found this large bread bowl very useful in the Kitchen. Four generations of the Schuyler family who owned this bowl also owned slaves – and it is probable that enslaved women would have worked in the Schuyler Kitchens, using this bowl for making bread.

### **Why was this bowl saved?**

Over time, this bowl came to be regarded as something special, most likely because of the initials and date inscribed on the bottom. General Schuyler's grandson, Philip Schuyler II, sold the house and property at Saratoga (Schuylerville) in 1837 and the Schuyler family no longer had ownership of this historic land. The new owner, George Strover, and his family were well aware of the Schuyler family's prominence in the area and its history, and preserved a few artifacts that were either left in the house, or brought back to it by Philip Schuyler II or other family members. When the National Park Service acquired the Schuyler House and a small remnant of the historic estate in 1950, there were very few objects in the house that had direct association to the Schuyler family, since they had not lived there for the past 100 years. However, among the several artifacts that DID remain here was this burl bowl – tied by its inscription to Johannes Schuyler.