

# The Abraham Staats House

by Kathy Ormosi

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The Abraham Staats House, the original section dating from 1740, belonged to the Staats, a Dutch family, for nearly 200 years. The central part of the house is believed to be the oldest, with a west wing added about 1781 and an east wing added about 1825. There is also an old kitchen, built before 1821, which may possibly have been one of the earliest structures.

In 1738, Peter Staats of Brooklyn purchased a 305-acre parcel land along the Raritan River, granting the land to his son Hendrick Staats in 1740, for the sum of 5 shillings. It's believed that Hendrick and his wife Maghtal built the first structure on the property. Their original house was one large room facing south, two smaller rooms to the north, and an unfinished garret or attic. We know of his existence there because by 1745, Hendrick is listed on the Franklin tax records as a landowner with 250 acres and ten cattle.

In 1769, Hendrick conveyed the property and house to his brother, John, who was a successful farmer with property in Hillsborough. John turned the property over to his son Abraham Staats, probably in anticipation of Abraham's upcoming marriage to Margaret DuBois of Hillsborough in 1770. In this house, Abraham and Margaret raised a family of five daughters and a son.

Abraham Staats was one a prosperous, respected man in Somerset County. He was a successful farmer, taught surveying and math and served as freeholder and tax collector for the county. He was also an ardent supporter of the American cause.

## The Staats and the American Revolution

During the American Revolution, his home served as headquarters for the Baron Frederick William von Steuben, a Prussian officer who was known as the drillmaster of the American Revolution. He and his military entourage stayed in the Staats home from March to June of 1779 during the second Middlebrook Encampment, while von Steuben continued his effort to drill the American troops and transform them into a more disciplined military force.

Around May 1, 1779, Von Steuben hosted a military review for General George Washington during a visit of the French minister to America, Conrad Girard as well as the Spanish emissary, Don Juan de Miralles. Afterwards, about 60 generals and colonels joined von Steuben for "a banquet under the trees," served in a large tent in a grove near the Staats house. Among those present were Generals Washington and Knox, Nathaniel Greene, the army's quartermaster; Lord Stirling; Alexander Hamilton, Washington's aide; and Tench Tilghman.

Also in the household at that time was Jack, one of the slaves owned by the Staats. Today, Jack is remembered as "Tory Jack," as part of a local legend that he may have helped gather information about British troops quartered in nearby New Brunswick. Whether fact or fancy, we celebrate **Tory Jack Day** at the Staats House during Black History Month each February, as a way to remember and acknowledge the contributions of free and enslaved African Americans like Jack and many others who are part of our American heritage.

For his loyalty to the American cause, the British Crown labeled Abraham an "arch traitor" along with his neighbor, Hendrick Fisher and another patriot, and threatened to hang them on sight. But they were never caught.

The annual "**Battle of Bound Brook**" event, based on an actual battle of the American Revolution, is one of our main events, held to commemorate the home's connection to this important time in American history.

## Canal Era to Present

The home also ushered in the era of the Delaware & Raritan Canal, a time of growth and industry for South Bound Brook and the towns along the canal.

The Canal, which runs along the Staats property, opened in 1835 and operated commercially for 100 years. Abraham's son Isaac, the Staats daughters, and their families, as well as the others in the Staats household including free servants and slaves, also lived here during the early canal era. After Isaacs' death in 1869, the house stayed in the Staats family through the turn of the century and into the 1930s.

“Canal Days” at the Abraham Staats House is held in September to celebrate the era of the house, with a focus on the early years of the canal’s operation. .

The last of Abraham and Margaret’s children, Sarah, died in 1871. However the home stayed within the related family into the 20th century, when Eugene LaTourette, a great grandson of Abraham who took residence about 1890 with his wife Florence, sold the home, in 1935. Afterwards, the house passed to a number of other private owners.

In 1999, the borough of South Bound Brook acquired the house with a grant from the county. Together, the Borough and Friends of Abraham Staats House, Inc., help maintain the house, administer grants to support the ongoing preservation of the house and run programs and tours during the year. The Staats House was entered onto the New Jersey Register of Historic Places on August 29, 2002 and the National Register of Historic Places on December 4, 2002.

### **The Friends of Abraham Staats House, Inc.**

The Friends of Abraham Staats House, Inc., a 501C (3) non-profit organization, was established in 1999 and incorporated in 2004 to support the ongoing restoration, preservation and interpretation of the historic Abraham Staats House.

The Friends' mission is to support the ongoing care and restoration of the house and its grounds, and to research and interpret the history of the property and its people. The goal is to foster an understanding of this history and its relationship to the history of South Bound Brook, surrounding communities, New Jersey and our country. To promote this understanding, the Friends develop and present public and educational programs, exhibits, publications and presentations in various media. Although not primarily a collecting institution, the Friends gather and preserve historic artifacts, documents and other material to assist in interpreting the Abraham Staats House, the site, and its history. The Friends also serve as a host organization, displaying outside collections and materials to enhance the interpretation. To achieve these goals, the Friends solicit grants and contributions and seek other sources of income.

The Friends are committed to creating a broad and inclusive constituency, to fostering collaborative partnerships, and to strengthening a sense of community and pride in South Bound Brook's local heritage and history.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

September 13 & 14

Canal Days at the Abraham Staats House

October 11 & 12

Somerset County Weekend Journey Through the Past

December 20 & 21

Holiday at the Staats House

For a list of our upcoming events, news and more:

**[www.staatshouse.com](http://www.staatshouse.com)**