

With campaigns heading both north and west from Albany throughout the French & Indian War, British planners frequently made use of Crailo's ideal location. A 1500-acre estate in Green Bush on the east bank of the Hudson River opposite the city of Albany, Crailo (Dutch for "crows' wood") not only could accommodate large numbers of provincial soldiers, but it could easily be reached by units arriving by boat from the south or by foot from any of the nearby New England colonies. From Crailo, troops could then move north into the Lake George/Lake Champlain region or west into the Mohawk Valley. At the same time, the river protected the city from the inevitable disorder that would result from incursions of large numbers of rough-and-tumble New England militiamen, and it served to separate the provincials from the British troops quartered in the city. British officers billeted in Albany prepared for campaigns in relative comfort, especially when hosted by the Albany gentry, which included the Van Rensselaers, Crailo's owners and a family of respected social standing. Contemporary reports suggest that British officers, General Lyman of Connecticut (a senior provincial officer) among them, were frequent guests of the Van Rensselaers at their well-stocked dinner table.

By the time of the French and Indian War, Crailo had already experienced the terror and trauma of French and Indian attacks. Its somewhat exposed position, despite its proximity to Albany, had always made it vulnerable. Since its origins in 1642, its buildings had been rebuilt and its defenses had been strengthened a number of times, almost always in response to increased threats. During King George's War, Johannes Van Rensselaer in 1746 added a stockade



A portion of a map of Rensselaerswijck, 1632. Fort Orange is shown, as well as the future site of Fort Crailo, on the east side of the Mauritius (Hudson) River, courtesy New York State Library Special Collections. Below, a 17th-century delftware plate found at Crailo, courtesy of Crailo State Historic Site."



and gunports in response to a series of French and Indian attacks on Green Bush which succeeded in killing or capturing 30 of Van Rensselaer's neighbors. Despite these continuous modifications, however, Crailo always remained more a fortified manor house than an actual fort.

With the onset of the French and Indian War, the grounds at Crailo quickly became a staging area for troops preparing to go off to battle. One can only imagine the chaos and turmoil created by thousands of untrained encamped colonial soldiers awaiting orders to move into the wilderness. At least one observer noted the rude behavior of those bumptious, country-bred would-be soldiers and turned it to his own use. Dr. Richard Shuckburgh, a British army surgeon and longtime friend and acquaintance of Sir William Johnson and the Van Rensselaers, was no stranger to Crailo. He rushed to tend to the wounded, including Johnson, when they arrived at a makeshift hospital at Crailo after the Battle of Lake George in 1755.

"The Trading House," the first Dutch settlement in the Albany area known as Fort Nassau, around 1615. The site of this early fort, abandoned in 1618, would become part of the vast Van Rensselaer patroonship. Crailo was established nearby. Painting by Len Tantillo, courtesy Len Tantillo.



Crailo State Historic Site in the winter of 2008. Extensive archaeology has been done on the site, uncovering thousands of artifacts spanning hundreds of years.

Known not only for his medical skills, but for his wit and his amiability, he thoroughly relished the antics of unskilled New Englanders as they tried to learn the complexities of military drill. To entertain fellow guests at the Van Rensselaer table, he penned several verses meant to ridicule the provincials' often laughable efforts. Setting those verses to a traditional mocking melody, he created *Yankee Doodle*. Little did he know that before 20 years had passed, those same unschooled provincials would adopt the song as their own and use it to mock their now British foes. ■ SB



Crailo SHS living history events present and interpret Dutch colonial culture. Above, a young woman prepares a dish of pumpkin cornmeal pancakes, a popular Dutch recipe.

## The story of “Yankee Doodle”

In June 1758, British army physician Dr. Richard Shuckburgh wrote the “Yankee Doodle” lyrics while at Crailo during the French and Indian War (1755–63). Shuckburgh’s words mocked the ill-equipped and undisciplined New England provincial troops, part of the large British army gathering to assault the French fort at Carillon (Ticonderoga). A guest of the Van Rensselaer family, Shuckburgh is said to have written the lyrics while sitting on the edge of a well at the rear of the house.

The now familiar tune was based on the old English nursery rhyme “Lucy Locket,” also used in “The Beggar’s Opera,” a well-known musical play from 1728 by John Gay. “Doodle” is probably from the Dutch *dudel*, meaning fool or simpleton. A “macaroni” in 1750s England was an ultra-fashionable man who dressed and spoke in an exaggerated and affected manner — a person who “exceeded the ordinary bounds of fashion.” Wealthy and fashionable young men who had been to Italy on the “Grand Tour” of the continent adopted the Italian word *maccherone* (a boorish fool) — humorously describing anything fashionable or *à la mode* as “very macaroni.”

The joke to Shuckburgh was that the naive and uncouth provincials might think to emulate the extreme of fashion by simply sticking feathers in their hats.

The song was used by the British to taunt the rebel Americans during the American Revolution (1775–83), but in time the Americans took the song as their own. Many different versions of the song exist. RT

### Some of the earliest lyrics:

*Yankee Doodle came to town  
 Riding on a pony,  
 Stuck a feather in his hat  
 And called him Macaroni.  
 Brother Ephraim sold his cow  
 To buy him a commission  
 And then he went to Canada  
 To fight for the nation.  
 But when Ephraim he came home  
 He proved an arrant coward,  
 He wouldn't fight the Frenchmen there  
 For fear of being devoured.*

This 1774 English print “What is this my son Tom” mocks the extreme and often absurd fashions of the “Macaroni.”  
 Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

