

**The Last U.S. Consul in Reval:**  
**Eugene Schuyler, Early American Slavophile**



*Eugene Schuyler*

Among early U.S. diplomats, Eugene Schuyler was a multi-faceted star. Born in Ithaca, New York on February 26, 1840, Schuyler began his studies at Yale University at the age fifteen, graduating in 1859 near the top of his class. In 1861, he became one of the first three graduate students to earn a Ph.D. from an American university – Yale – before going on to help Noah Porter revise *Webster's Dictionary*. Next, Schuyler decided to study law, graduating from Columbia Law School in 1863. While practicing law in New York City, he befriended several Russian Navy officers in September 1863 and decided to learn Russian. His first teacher appears

to have been a Russian Orthodox priest. In 1865, Schuyler became a staff member and active contributor to *The Nation*, which would become one of America's leading liberal magazines.

After his acceptance into the U.S. Consular Service in 1866, Schuyler received his first assignment as the U.S. Consul to Moscow thanks to his knowledge of Russian. While waiting to go to Russia, Schuyler also developed an interest in Finnish after he was asked to edit the first U.S. edition of Finland's national epic – the *Kalevala* (1867) – translated by John Porter. On his way to Russia to take up his new duties effective August 1867, Schuyler met with Ivan Turgenev at Baden-Baden in Germany and received a letters of introduction to various Russian literary figures including Count Leo Tolstoy.

In addition to his exemplary work as a U.S. diplomat, Consul Schuyler also became Turgenev's first U.S. translator with the 1867 publication of *Fathers and Sons*. While working in Moscow, Schuyler was a frequent guest of Prince Vladimir Odoyevsky's leading literary salon. Schuyler also developed a passion for exotic travel. During the summer of 1868, Schuyler journeyed down the Volga to Orenburg by steamboat before crossing the Urals by carriage and going as far as Kirgizia. Pursuing his literary interests, Schuyler spent a week at Tolstoy's Yasnaya Polyana estate in October 1868 where the two men went hunting together. As the Tolstoy's young children had an English governess, English was one of the languages spoken at home. And so while Tolstoy finished his work on *War and Peace*, Schuyler helped re-organize Tolstoy's library. But this Moscow literary idyll did not last. Not long after Secretary of State Hamilton Fish was sworn in, Schuyler discovered that he had lost his position as U.S. Consul in Moscow in May 1869.

Schuyler secured his next assignment as the U.S. Consul in Reval, a position he held from November 1869 until March 1870 – although he appears to have been resident for only part of this time. After Schuyler's onward posting as the Secretary to the U.S. Legation in St. Petersburg, the U.S. Consul in Reval was shut down and replaced by a locally hired U.S. Consular Agent. During his tour in St. Petersburg from April 1870 to July 1876, Schuyler continued to travel extensively across Russia and Central Asia – providing detailed information of his trips to the National Geographic Society and writing a two-volume travelogue known as *Turkestan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkestan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (1876). He also visited the Grand Duchy of Finland in October 1870 where his work on the English-edition of the *Kalevala* was already well known. While working in Russia, Schuyler also found time to start his research on his two-volume biography of *Peter the Great, Emperor of Russia* which was eventually published in 1884. During his extended time in Russia's capital, Schuyler spent at least thirty months as the Chargé d'Affaires. And since none of his U.S. Ministers (Andrew G. Curtin, James L. Orr, Marshall Jewell, and George H. Boker) knew Russian or French, Secretary Schuyler was an essential part of the U.S. Mission for more than six years.

After spending a total of nine years working in the Russian Empire, Schuyler became the U.S. Consul General in Constantinople – as well as the Secretary to the Legation – in February 1876. Before the start of his new tour, he met up with Gertrude Wallace King (daughter of Columbia College President Charles King) in Paris where they would eventually marry on July 12, 1877. Along the way, Schuyler became an international figure known across Europe – and feted by

the British Royal family among others – for his work in documenting Ottoman atrocities committed during the 1876 Bulgarian uprising. In fact, Schuyler's detailed report served as one of the pretexts for the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 as it gave the Russian Empire “just cause” to protect fellow Slavs in the Balkans. By February 1878, the victorious Russian Army was at the gates of Constantinople, bringing with them U.S. Military Attaché Francis Vinton Greene. For more than a month, Schuyler and Greene worked together, becoming friends. Forty-one years later, Francis Greene's son Warwick (born not long afterwards on December 18, 1879) would become the first U.S. Chief of Mission to the Baltic States effective March 1919.

During his eventful tenure in Constantinople, Schuyler also helped the new Bulgarian leadership draft their country's first constitution. He also hosted various high ranking officials including former U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant in March 1878. And so it should come as no surprise that the Ottoman Empire finally declared Schuyler *persona non grata* in spring 1878. Expelled from Constantinople, Schuyler ended up working as the U.S. Consul in Birmingham, England where he completed the first U.S. translation of Tolstoy's *The Cossacks* (1878). In summer 1879, Schuyler became the U.S. Consul General in Rome. But his achievements in the Balkans were never forgotten. On April 4, 1879, Exarch Antim I – the President of the first Bulgarian National Assembly – wrote Schuyler to thank him upon Bulgaria's independence: “The free Bulgarian nation hastens to thank you heartily for your great services, and to assure you that your honored name will hold an enviable place in the history of the liberation of our nation.”

Schuyler next assignments were as the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Romania (1880-1882) and then as the first U.S. Minister to Greece, Romania, and Serbia (1882-1884), moving from Bucharest to Athens in January 1883. But in July 1884, Schuyler was forced to leave the U.S. diplomatic service when Congressional budget cuts eliminated his new position as minister. He returned to the United States in November 1884 to teach at both Johns Hopkins University and Cornell University. During his time in academia, Schuyler turned his lectures into one of the first published studies of U.S. consular and diplomatic services: *American Diplomacy and the Furtherance of Commerce* (1886). As early as 1881, Schuyler advocated for the merger of the U.S. consular and diplomatic services – a reform which eventually took place with the Rogers Act of 1924 which created the modern U.S. Foreign Service. As his wife Gertrude had a particular fondness for Italy, the couple moved to Alassio on the Italian Riviera in March 1886 where Schuyler continued writing and traveling. During this time, he wrote a lengthy reminiscence on Count Leo Tolstoy which appeared in *Scribner's* magazine in May 1889.

When James G. Blaine became the new U.S. Secretary of State in March 1889, he tried to make Schuyler his Assistant Secretary. But after the nomination ran into some opposition in the U.S. Senate, Schuyler accepted instead an appointment as the U.S. Consular General in Cairo, Egypt, where he arrived on October 1, 1889. He was fascinated with Egypt and spent all of his free time learning about its history and traveling along the Nile. In a letter to his sister dated October 14, Schuyler writes: “the moist heat at this season, when the Nile is overflowed, and the consequent flies, mosquitoes, etc., beggar all description.” As fate would have it, Schuyler contracted malaria sometime in early 1890 from which he would never completely recover. He died quite suddenly while convalescing in Venice, Italy on July 16, 1890. Upon the 1901

posthumous publication of his essays and memoirs, a review in the *New York Times* described Schuyler as “one of America’s most brilliant scholars, patriots, and men of letters.” A true testament to this talent, both his travelogue *Turkestan* and his biography *Peter the Great* are still in print today.

*The compiler would like to thank David Siefkin, Snejana Ianeva, Elena Andrushenkova, and Vera Sevastyanova for their help.*



The U.S. Consulate in Reval at Narva Street 7. (Photo: Tallinn Photo Museum)