

History of Bergen Village

Written by Daniel Van Winkle for the guidance of pupils of the public, parochial, and private schools of Jersey City in the competition for The New York Times Prizes for the best essay upon the founding and history of Bergen Village.

SECOND ARTICLE.

AFTER the charter of the New Netherlands Company expired the Dutch West India Company was incorporated in 1621, and it was given the exclusive right of trade with the country of New Netherland, with full powers of government over the territory it should explore and colonize. Active operations were begun at once, and a trading post was established on the Island of Manhattan, near the site of the present Bowling Green. This company was now to all intents and purposes the ruler of New Netherland, although under the supervision of the States General of Holland. By the terms of its charter it was given the right to establish such local governments and appoint such officers as were thought necessary. The governmental control was placed in the hands of a Director General or Governor, who received his commission from the States General, and a Council, the members of which were appointed by the Director. Thus, as may readily be seen, the Director himself had practically full power, and his rule extended to the furthest limits of the territory as claimed by the Dutch. The seat of Government was on Manhattan Island, or, as it was then called, New Amsterdam.

It must be remembered that the great object of the West India Company was to secure all the profit that could be obtained through trade with this country. With this object in view, the early traders made no effort at permanent settlement. They built houses and forts, but these were merely for comfort and protection while trading with the Indians.

It was soon found, however, that this method would not repay the company for the great expense to which it had been subjected, and new measures were determined upon to awaken new interest in the colony. In 1626 Peter Minuit, the then Governor, bought Manhattan Island from the Indians for sixty guilders, a sum equal to about \$24 in our currency.

In 1629 the "Charter of Freedoms and Exemption" was granted by the company, which stated: "That such members of the company who should within four years plant a colony of fifty souls upward of fifteen years old" should be acknowledged as Patroons of New Netherland, and were permitted to extend their settlements four miles—equal to sixteen English miles—along the shore of a river, on the one side, or one-half that distance on each, and extending back "so far into the country as the situation of the occupiers will permit." These privileges were granted as expressed to the "Patroons, masters, or private individuals who shall settle any colony or bring cattle therein in New Netherland."

Several members of the company took advantage of this offer and made claims, but none of these interests us at this time save that of Michael Pauw, a Burgomaster of Amsterdam. He laid claim to several plots of land, among them Aharsimus and Arresick, extending along the River Mauritius and Island Manhattan on the north, and surrounded by marshes, serving sufficiently for distinct boundaries.

Pauw received the patent by virtue of which he became owner of the above described land Nov. 22, 1630, of course subject to the conditions as laid down in the company's offer. This is in effect the present territory of Hudson County, and from this time may be dated the beginning of the settlement of New Jersey. Pauw called his grant Pavonia.

After he became the owner of this territory he seems to have made no effort to carry out his agreement. He sent over from Holland his superintendent, one Jan Evertsen Bout, who arrived here June 17, 1634, and settled at Communipaw. He continued there for two years, farming somewhat and trading with the Indians. In 1636 he was succeeded by Cornelius van Vorst, for whom a house was built at Aharsimus, located about the present Fifth and Henderson Streets.

Doubtless both of these locations were chosen, not only because of their attractiveness as home sites, but likewise on account of their convenience for communication with New Amsterdam. The curving shore of the river had formed similar coves at each of these spots, with high banks sloping to the water's edge, covered with trees and shrubbery, and sheltered from the fierce northeast storms that at times beat down upon the water. A few years since some faint idea of the beauty of these locations could have been obtained at Communipaw, but the march of improvement, and the demands for extended traffic have carried out the shore some several thousand feet beyond the original river bank and wiped out all trace of the early beauty.

Even before the occupation of this territory by Pauw's Superintendents, the Dutch West India Company had established a trading post on the point of land afterward known as Paulus Hook, and among its officers there was Michael Paulaz, from whom the name was derived. Adventurous traders had lived among the Indians for convenience of trade with them and for purposes of gain, but the huts they built were only temporary shelter.

The Patroons, as owners of the soil, leased portions of their grants to those who came to the new land to found their homes. Sometimes these were not able to bring their families at their own expense, in which case they received a free passage and necessary advances from the Patroon. In return they bound themselves to remain his tenants for a certain time, or until the debt was paid, subject to special conditions, one of which was that they must get everything they needed from the Patroon's agent, in exchange for what they raised on the farm. It is not very difficult to imagine that the debt was not wiped out until the Patroon was satisfied with the profit he had received from his tenant, and until this time, he could not leave without consent. But Pauw seemed unwilling to assume any obligations even to secure occupants for his grant, consequently its improvement was very slow.

When reminded of this and the condition of his grant, he was not at all disturbed, but held on to his possessions and refused to give them up. After much controversy the company purchased from him his claim to Pavonia, and thus again became full owner of the soil. In order to clearly understand the situation during those early times we should become familiar with the topography or face of the country. We can scarcely realize the appearance of things nearly 300 years ago. In fact, in the study of history

at any time we must divest ourselves of present surroundings, and get back in imagination to the times of which we study, in order to obtain a full and satisfactory idea of the conditions then existing.

The territory of Hudson County in the early days presented a very different appearance from the present. In place of the busy factories and crowded tenements we now see about us were swamps and marshes and hills covered with dense forests; and instead of the great vessels plying to and fro over the neighboring rivers the canoe of the Indian darted hither and thither, and the wild fowl drifted on their tides, or rose in flocks from the marshes round about.

What we now know as lower Jersey City was composed of a few sand banks rising above the swamp, that oftentimes was covered with the tide. Paulus Hook was a mound extending out into the bay between Aharsimus and Communipaw Coves; the plot is at present marked by York, Warren, and Essex Streets and the Hudson River. At Aharsimus a similar mound rose from the marsh, and here Van Vorst established his farm or bouerie as it was called, and for many years, even as late as 1840, fields of waving corn and grain, covered portions of this section of Pavonia. To the west of Paulus Hook and between the present Rail Road Avenue and York Street, and Barrow and Monmouth Streets, was a third plot of high ground.

The intervening space was marsh and low land, intersected with ditches and creeks, one of which, afterward called the Mill Creek, was of good size. To the north along the shore of the river, the high promontory of Hoboken jutted out, and to the southward the sand hills of Communipaw sloped gently to the river bank. These five prominences were in the early days the only habitable spots east of the ridge on which Bergen was in after days located, and which is now known as Jersey City Heights.

The early traders found the whole country inhabited by Indians, who roamed over the soil in their native wildness. These were divided into different tribes, each tribe living separately and apart by itself and having a chief to whom it was subject. Some of these tribes were inclined to be friendly, but for the most part their savage instincts were given full rein. We have seen the different treatment received by Hudson on his arrival, from the Indians living on the east and west banks of the river.

Fortunately for the early settlers of Pavonia, their lot was cast among those inclined to be friendly, and for some time nothing occurred to disturb this kindly feeling. The natives brought the furs they had secured in the chase to the homes of the settlers and bartered them for the beads and gaudy ornaments awaiting them, and oftentimes the smoke of the pipes of the white man and copper-colored Indian, arose together as they exchanged their goods with mingled "patois."

But human nature in those early times, was very like the human nature of the present day. In their dealing with the natives some of the more grasping of the traders treated them unjustly, and this they very naturally resented. Their instincts taught them self-protection and their savage natures prompted a speedy revenge, hence trouble arose, and constant watchfulness was needed on the part of the whites, to prevent surprise by the crafty Indians.

By and by the advantages of location attracted the attention of others. May 1, 1638, Abraham Isaacs Verplanck obtained a grant of land at Paulus Hook, and Jan Evertsen Bout, Pauw's former Superintendent, secured a lease of the farm at Communipaw he had formerly occupied. Dirck Straatmacher received a grant of land forming the greater part of what is now the Greenville section, and June 1, 1641, Aert Tunisen Van Putten leased the island now known as Hoboken for twelve years, and the same year Myndert Myndertsen secured a patent to land along the Hackensack extending to Tappan.

In course of time other traders came, some of whom probably landed at Communipaw and followed the Indian trail up over the heights. Others perhaps sailed up the Mill Creek and there found the trail leading up over the east side of the rocks—afterward the "Mill Road" that led to the "maize land." They found here a little spot of ground that had been cleared by the Indians and on which stood the grain and Indian corn waving in the breeze. Doubtless this was to them a welcome sight, as it proved to them the fertility of the soil. They found the whole ridge of ground well suited to the farmer's needs and determined here to found their homes.

Hence after a little time here and there the smoke from the homes of these hardy settlers was seen curling above the surrounding tree tops, and the forest stillness was broken by the sound of the axe as they cleared their home lots. Their houses were rudely built of the tree trunks they had felled, and covered with a thatch or roof of reeds and grass gathered from the nearby marsh. The chimneys were outside the buildings and made from slabs of wood fastened together, a combination that would not be accepted as a fair risk by the most liberal-minded insurance man of the present time, and even in those days considered to be full of danger.

But the increasing number of the whites aroused the jealousy of the savages, and they resented at once any real or fancied injustice. The cattle of the settlers were often missing, and now and again their haystacks were burned. If any attempt was made to redress the wrongs it was seized upon as an excuse for further depredations. Gov. Kieft, who was the Governor over New Netherland at this time, added to the bad feeling that had grown up, by demanding from the Indians a tribute or tax, claiming they were his subjects.

Accustomed to the freedom of their savage life, they resented this action by their increased hostility. The old open friendliness was now supplanted by a hostile sullenness, and the settlers found their cattle slain or driven off and fields laid waste. At last one of them was shot while roofing his house, by an Indian who had been lurking in the woods near by. Kieft demanded the murderer should be given up. The demand was refused, but a payment in wampum was offered instead. This was made from black and white shells, cut and polished, on each of which a certain value was placed and which was used as currency and passed from hand to hand, the same as the coin of the present day. The offer was refused and again the punishment of the murderer insisted upon, and so the breach was widened, and the peace and quiet of former days was now displaced by fear of savage outbreak.

[The third of Mr. Van Winkle's articles will appear to-morrow.]