

HARLEM IN THE OLD TIMES

FIGHTING HOSTILE INDIANS ON THE FLATS.

THE FIRST SETTLER AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM—ORGANIZING THE VILLAGE—LAND AT LOW RATES—A GOOD ROAD WANTED.

Those of us who prefer the shady streets and lanes of Harlem to the brown-stone walls of the lower part of the City have no hesitation, provided we have the necessary cash, in going up there and renting a house and taking our families there, nor even in leaving our wives and children there through the day while we come down town to business. It is such a quiet and peaceful place that we can hardly realize—what we may learn authentically from the early records of the City—that at one time a man's scalp was in great danger if he ventured beyond the further end of the Bowery, and that his house was pretty sure to be burned by hostile Indians—not his brown-stone-front, with gas, and water, and range, and plate-glass; nor even his cozy little cottage, with its neat front yard and its Mansard roof, and, perhaps, its mortgage—but his isolated farm-house, with bare earth for its floors, and dried reeds for its roof. We stand upon a platform of the elevated railroad, and grumble if we have to wait a minute and a half for a train, and then when, half an hour later, we are in Harlem, we grumble at something else—the time was too long, or the car was too cold, or the brakeman would insist upon slamming the doors at every station. We can hardly find room in the nervous but highly-civilized Metropolitan head for the fact that, not such a terrible time ago, the residents of Harlem were complaining that there was no decent wagon-road between that village and the City, nor even a road that a man could ride over on horseback without danger to his life. The story of the settlement of Harlem forms an interesting part of the early history of this City. Like most new places, it was not born without sacrificing some lives and much property; but, when once the breath of life reached it, it flourished and grew, even in the early Dutch times, and it kept on flourishing and growing, until it reached so far down the island that at last it was swallowed up by the great City.

Jochem Pietersen Kuyter, a gentleman of education, who had been a commander in the East India Company, under the King of Denmark, was the first settler in Harlem, and his experiences on the upper end of Manhattan Island were not reassuring. He came to "New-Netherland" in 1639, and soon afterward bought the flats on which Harlem now stands. He was a man of means, and, having a taste for rural life, he built a house on his lands and took his family there, calling the place Zegendaal, or Happy Valley. It did not prove a happy valley to Herr Kuyter, however. In 1643 an Indian war broke out, and he was exposed to the depredations of the enemy. An old record says that—

"March 9, 1644.—Appeared the following persons, who, jointly and severally, at the request of Mr. Jochem Pietersen Kuyter, declared as follows: Cornelisen Cornelisen, about 22 years old, declares that he, being a sentinel at night before the house of said Jochem Pietersen, being about 2 o'clock, near the corn-rick, about 50 paces from the barn, did see approaching a burning pile, the flame as blue as the flame of brimstone, about 20 paces from the house, between the dunghill and cherry-door, which pile or arrow fell on the thatched reeds with which the house was roofed, and the house was soon in full flame through the force of the wind. A little after he heard the firing of a gun from the same spot whence the arrow came. He saw the house burned to the ground. He says, further, that the English soldiers, while the fire lasted, would not leave the cellar in which they slept, and remained there till the house was destroyed. In consequence, they obtained no assistance whatever from the English.

"Jacob Lambertsen, about 20 years old, declares, in addition to what was stated by Cornelisen, that when the house was in full flame he heard the report of a gun, which they suspected was fired by the Indians, whom they still heard the next morning hallooing and firing."

About a year after the burning of Pietersen Kuyter's house, however, Jan Evertsen Bout, and Claes Jansen Backer made a declaration that, from conversation and association with the Indians, they knew that "it was well and generally known by the savages that the Dutch burned the house."

But Kuyter seemed to have an affection for the Harlem Flats, and he was not to be driven out of his "Happy Valley" home so easily. After peace was established with the Indians, about five years later, he desired to reinstate himself upon his property. His purse was seriously flattened by his previous misfortunes, and this time he was not able to erect the necessary buildings without pecuniary assistance. He called upon his friends to help him, but that they did not go into the work purely from motives of friendship is shown by the agreement made before the work was begun, as follows:

"This day, the 23d of September, 1651, an amicable agreement was made between Mr. Jochem Pietersen Kuyter, a freemercant, on the one side, and the Hon. Petrus Stuyvesant, Director-General of New-Netherland, Curacao, and its dependencies; Lucas Rodenberg, Governor of Curacao, and Cornelius De Potter, free merchant, of the other side, concerning a piece of land lying on Manhattan Island and belonging to said Jochem Pietersen Kuyter, named Zegendaal, (Happy Vale,) or by the Indians called Schorrakyn, bounded on the south by land of William Beekman, Lieutenant of the Citizens' Company, at this place, and upon the border of the Herr Johannes La Montagne's lot, so on the first rock stretching northward into the Great Kill, [Harlem River,] having to the west, toward the North River, a meadow of three or four morgens, [six or eight acres.] The aforesaid land contains about 200 morgens, [400 acres,] but is not precisely known, and yet remains to be ascertained with more accuracy on the following conditions, viz.:

"That said Kuyter shall cede, transport, and convey to the said Stuyvesant, Rodenberg, and De Potter the first three-fourths parts of said land, being one-fourth part for each; while he, said Kuyter, retains one-fourth part for himself, and to his own behoof, upon condition that said Kuyter shall receive from the aforesaid gentlemen, the sum of 1,000 Carolus guilders, [equivalent to \$400.] of which sum each of said gentlemen is to pay a third part, with this understanding, that the said money is to be employed, at once, in the cultivation of the said land. The said land to remain undivided, until it is agreed, by a majority of those interested, to make separation of the shares.

"During which said time, Jochem Pietersen Kuyter is to remain the cultivator and superintendent of all the land, to the greatest profit and best advantage of all interested, among whom he is to distribute the profits, in equal shares, whether such profits come from grain, stock, or otherwise. It being understood, however, that the wife of Jochem Pietersen Kuyter may keep for her family some hens and ducks. The said Kuyter shall receive for his services, as cultivator, 150 guilders, that is to say, each of the three partners shall pay 50 guilders."

The agreement continued that "to make a good beginning, with God's assistance," a decent house should be built immediately at the expense of the partners, to be occupied by Kuyter and his family. But Kuyter's second venture in Harlem was more disastrous than his first, for, in 1654, he was murdered by the Indians in the house that was thus built, and the "Happy Valley" was immediately deserted by his family, and the property went to waste. Four years later, however, a more extended and more successful effort was made to establish a settlement in Harlem.

The settlement of the northern end of Manhattan Island was begun in earnest when, on March 4, 1668, there was entered in the big Dutch books the following minute: "The Director-General and Council in New-Netherland give notice that they have resolved, with a view to promote agriculture and the security of this island, with the animals pasturing upon it, and also with the intention to increase the amusements of this City, Amsterdam, in New-Netherland, to form a new village, or hamlet, at the northern end of this island, in the vicinity of the lands of Jochem Pietersen, deceased; and in order, also, that agriculture may be further encouraged, the intended village is favored with the following privileges:

"First—The inhabitants of such village shall be granted, in fee, 18, 20, to 29 morgens [of 2 acres each] of plow-land, and 6 to 8 morgens of meadow for pasture, and 6 to 8 morgens have exemption from paying tithes during 15 years following the 1st of May next, provided they pay within three years, either at once or by installments, 8 guilders [\$3 20] for each morgen of arable land, which shall be for the benefit of the representatives of said Jochem Pietersen or his creditors, said party having, in former days, been expelled from said lands and suffered thereon great losses."

The Director-General and the Council, in the second place, promise to assist and protect the inhabitants of the new village in every way possible, and to furnish them with "12 or 15 soldiers, when necessary, at the expense of the Government, except for their board and lodging." The Director-General and Council "shall favor the village, as soon as it shall be increased to 20 or 25 families, with a subaltern Bench of Justices." And they promise that, as

soon as this number of families have settled there, they will "make every effort to supply them with a good, pious, and orthodox minister, on account of whose support the Director-General and Council will pay half the salary and the other half must be satisfied by the inhabitants." They will employ negroes to assist the inhabitants to make a good wagon-road to New-Amsterdam, and they "will not undertake the establishment of any other village or concentration, nor permit others to do so, until the aforesaid village shall have arrived *in esse*;" they will "establish a ferry in the vicinity of the village, with the accommodation of a good scow, to ferry cattle and horses over the river; and further, they will favor the said village with a cattle and horse fair." Persons desiring to settle in the new village must leave their names as soon as possible at the Secretary's office, and shall afterward, without delay, put "an able-bodied and well-armed person on the spot selected or purchased."

This project succeeded, and the village was named New-Harlem. Efforts were soon afterward made to establish other villages in the neighborhood, but they were looked upon unfavorably by the Government, and for some years New-Harlem had the field entirely to itself. In 1663, the Schepens of the Village of New-Harlem presented a petition to the Director-General and Council of New-Harlem, setting forth that some of the inhabitants would find great difficulty in paying immediately the \$1 60 an acre, and asking that they be released from this obligation, the payment of tithes to begin at the expiration of 10 years instead of 15. This request was not granted, but the purchasers were afterward released from their obligation to pay for the land in consideration of the payment of tithes beginning at the expiration of eight years.

The inhabitants of young Harlem must have done most of their traveling to the City by water, for eight years after its settlement, in 1671, it was recorded: "Whereas, the road between this City and the Village of New-Harlem is impassable, and it is necessary a road should be maintained, it is ordered that the Overseers of Roads and the magistrates of Harlem lay out a suitable road, and that it be made by the inhabitants of Harlem, in conjunction with those living on the other side of Fresh Water, [Collect Pond,] each within their respective limits." This road was long building, for a year later it is recorded: "Whereas, the road to New-Harlem is still unfinished, and many complaints have been made even that people lately wishing to travel over that road on horseback have been in danger of losing their lives by the bad condition of the road, therefore, Overseers are appointed to urge the inhabitants to go on with the work, and to impose fines for neglect." This road was finished in 1673, the following year. There had been a bridge across "the Fresh Water," a brook that emptied the waters of the Collect Pond into the East River, running a little north of the present Pearl-street. This bridge was built anew in 1695, at a cost of £1 16s. In 1707, in pursuance of an act of Assembly, the Highway Commissioners reported the plan of the road to Harlem, "To begin at the Spring Garden Gate, [Broadway, near Fulton-street,] to the Fresh Water, the course being east by north; thence by a small turning to the tree in the highway upon the hill, [head of Chatham-square,] so along the lane [Bowery] to the furthestmost house in the same, the course being about north-north-east. From the said last house the road to run along the fence upon the right hand, as the road now lies, to Kip's Runs, [the brook emptying into Kip's Bay,] from thence north-north-east to the bridge beyond the Kill; from thence to the corner of Turtle Bay Farm to the top of the next hill, about east-north-east; from thence to the Saw-mill bridge north-east a little northerly; from Saw-mill bridge along Mr. Codrington's fence to the half-way house, the road to turn to the right hand, and so over the creek to Harlem." There was no bridge over the Harlem River till about the time of the Revolutionary War, nearly a century after the first settlement of the village. In 1774, the Common Council granted permission for the building of a bridge to shorten the post-road between this City and East Chester, the mails having previously been carried by way of King's Bridge, which was built about 1690.