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SHORT HISTORY

of STATEN ISLAND

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By CORNELIUS G. KOLFF



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EARLY
HISTORY
OF
STATEN ISLAND

BY
CORNELIUS G. KOLFF

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DEDICATION

It is with a feeling of pleasure and of gratitude that I dedicate this modest volume to my old friend, Ira K. Morris, whose history of Staten Island has endeared him to all those who love Staten Island and whose indefatigable and painstaking historical researches of many years have challenged the admiration of those interested in the history of our Island.

CORNELIUS G. KOLFF.

Harbor View,
Rosebank, N. Y.
May, 1918.





INTRODUCTION

A feeling of gratitude for the many happy years spent on Staten Island, and the desire to awaken in the hearts of the growing generations of Staten Islanders an interest and a love for their native Island, have induced the writer to present this short history.

Being neither a literary man nor an historian, the writer asks the kind indulgence of the critical reader. Much information has been obtained from histories of Staten Island, written by men more intimately acquainted with events.

If this modest volume serves to instruct the youth of Staten Island, and to create a love for the place, the writer's effort will be amply rewarded.

CORNELIUS G. KOLFF.



Early History of Staten Island

At the time Christopher Columbus discovered America, in the year 1492, Staten Island was inhabited by Raritan Indians, a branch of the Delaware Nation.

With the exception of the sandy beaches and the salt meadows, the Island was almost covered with woods, and owing to this fact it was called by the Indians "Aquehonga Manadnock" — "The Island of Woods."

In the forests were many wild animals, such as bears, panthers, and deers, and also wild birds. In the lakes, the creeks and waters surrounding the Island were fish of all kinds, and in the waters along the shores were oysters and clams.

The Indians spent their time hunting the wild animals, fishing in the streams and sea, and sometimes in wars with neighboring tribes.

The Indian women cultivated the fields and grew corn, which they ground with stones in wooden mortars, and made into mash. They also raised some tobacco, which the men smoked. Their food consisted of corn, venison, fish, oysters and clams. Their clothing was made of skins of wild animals.

Their weapons were mainly arrows, with points made of flint, and axes of stone, fastened to wooden handles by leather strings. Their fish-hooks were made of fish bones, and the claws of birds. They lived in tents, called wigwams, made of the bark of trees and the skin of animals.

The Indian money consisted of shells, with a hole in the centre, through which a string was passed. This money was called "wampum." Their religion consisted of the worship of good and evil spirits.

The Indian doctor was called the "Medicine Man." They may have used some herbs in curing the sick; but their principal "medicine" was the making of as much noise as possible, by howling and groaning, in order to drive the bad spirits out of the sick and the dying.

The Indian chiefs usually had several wives, and these were called "squaws." The children were called "papooses." The Staten Island Indians did not chop down trees, because they had no suitable tools; but they built a fire around a tree, and when enough of the trunk was charred or burnt, the tree fell. Their boats were made of tree trunks by burning out the middle of the log.

In order to make a fire, they rubbed two pieces of dry wood against each other until they finally ignited. Whenever they wanted some good ground on which to plant corn or tobacco, they "girdled" the trees—that is, they cut away the bark with their knives, made of flint or shell. The trees then died, and later they burnt them and thus secured the ground.

They had clay pots in which they boiled their water. Their meals were very simple, and they drank nothing but the pure, clear water from the many fine springs which were found on the Island.

Just as we have weather prophets to-day, who tell us in advance what kind of weather we are going to have, so the Indians had a "weather priest," whom they called "Kitzinake." He had the queer habit of never eating any food prepared by married women.

Our New Year, as we all know, commences on the first of January, but the Indian New Year commenced in March, when the days and nights were of the same length, and they celebrated the New Year with feasts.

They smoked their tobacco in long pipes, made of the same serpentine rock found to-day in the hills between Tompkinsville and Richmond.

From time to time, they had great feasts, which were usually celebrated at some point near the Seashore. They evidently ate a great many fish, oysters and clams, as indicated by the large heaps of shells which can be seen to this day. At these feasts they sometimes amused themselves by torturing prisoners taken in their warfare with neighboring tribes. They usually tied their prisoners to stakes, and then shot them with arrows which had sharp points made of flint.

At one of the places where these feasts were celebrated, near Tottenville, the skeleton of a big Indian, nearly seven feet tall, was found, with arrows still sticking to his chest bone. He had evidently been taken prisoner, had been tied to a tree or stake, and then shot to death.

As both food and water were necessary, their villages were usually situated near the seashore, not far distant from a good spring. We know that there were Indian villages at Tottenville, near the Southern end of the Island; at Holland's Hook, opposite Elizabethport; at Green Ridge; at Giffords, and at West New Brighton. At the latter point was the "Council Place," where the Indians usually met the white men, to carry on peace negotiations after a war.

When the Indians died, they were buried in a sitting position on a log, and alongside of them was placed a pot of food, a spoon with which to eat, and some wampum, or money, so that they would be well supplied with necessaries in the Spirit Land, or the "Happy Hunting Grounds," into which they passed at death.

THE FIRST COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

Thirty-two years after Columbus discovered America, on a summer afternoon in 1524, the Indians living on the South Shore of the Island were greatly astonished at seeing, far out at sea, what looked to them to be a huge bird; but which, as it came nearer and nearer, proved to be a ship in full sail. They had never seen anything like it before, and as soon as the news of this wonderful thing spread, the Indians swarmed to the shore, where they hid behind trees to watch the strange visitor. It was a French ship, commanded by an Italian captain, called "Verrazano." The first discovery of Staten Island by white men was thus made by an Italian.

The ship sailed up the Lower Bay, and anchored in the Narrows. The Indians from their hiding places saw queer men with white faces and beards, and heard them talk a language which they did not understand.

As frequently happens now, on hot summer afternoons, a sudden storm came up, and the captain, fearing that his ship might be driven ashore by the storm, hoisted his anchors, put out to sea, and disappeared as rapidly as he had come.

The Indians watched the ship until it faded away in the distance, and scarcely knew what to think or say. You may well imagine that it was discussed by them for years afterwards. They wondered whether it would return, and watched for it; but no ship came, and the strange incident was related around the camp fires of the rude natives, as we tell fairy tales to-day.

SECOND COMING OF THE WHITE MAN OR "SWANNAKIN"

Finally, on the third day of September, 1609, eighty-five years after Verrazzano's discovery of Staten Island, and after all the Indians who had witnessed the first coming of the white man had gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds, another ship was seen for out at sea, and word was rapidly passed along among the Indians that the story told by their fathers and grandfathers must be true, for the strangers were returning; and again the Indians swarmed to the point of land opposite The Narrows. This time it was a Dutch ship, the "Half Moon," in charge of an English captain, Henry Hudson. He anchored in the same place at which Verrazzano had stopped, and the weather being fair he launched a boat with a few men, who rowed through The Narrows, and along the North Shore of the Island, through what is now called the Kill van Kull, as far as Holland's Hook, the Indians following along the shore, and watching every movement

Thinking that these new comers must be enemies, some of the Indians, more courageous than others, set out in a large canoe. The white men turned back and when they reached a point about where West New Brighton is now located, the Indians in the canoe attacked them with their bows and arrows. John Coleman, who was in command, was shot in the throat with an arrow, and died while the boat was returning to the "Half Moon."

Finding, however, that the white men had evidently not come to fight, the Indians tried to make friends of them; and after some hesitation, they came

on board the "Half Moon," and brought Indian corn and tobacco as tokens of friendship. Captain Henry Hudson detained two Indians, treated them well and gave them red coats to wear, which greatly pleased them. When, after a few days, he weighed anchor and sailed up the Bay and the great river (named after him, "The Hudson River"), he took them with him. On his sail up the river, Hudson had some fights with hostile tribes of Indians, and the two from Staten Island becoming frightened, jumped overboard, when the ship was near what is now West Point, swam ashore and traveled back to Staten Island, on foot, alarming the Indians on the way and creating a feeling of hostility against the white men.

Consequently, when Hudson returned to Staten Island, which he named "Staaten Eylandt," in honor of the States General of Holland, on October 4th, 1609, he met with a hostile reception when he attempted to land. As he was not looking for trouble, Hudson weighed anchor, and sailed for Holland, to report the results of his discovery.

The Indians, as their forefathers had done eighty-five years before, stationed men on the high points of the Island, where they watched day and night for the return of the white men.

A year later another Dutch ship came, and on attempting to land the Indians again attacked the white men and forced them to leave.

After another year, in 1611, a third ship came; and two years later several ships passed through The Narrows, on their way up the Hudson, where they traded European goods or furs.

FIRST SETTLEMENT OF STATEN ISLAND

Up to 1613 no white men had settled on Staten Island; but about 1624 a number of immigrants from what is now Belgium, arrived on Staten Island. They were called Walloons, after the country from which they came.

They did not remain long. During their stay here, however, a very important event happened, namely, the birth of the first white child on Staten Island. It was a girl and her name was Sarah Ropye (or Rapelja). Direct descendants of the family still reside here.

The Indians drove the Walloons off the Island, and they moved to Manhattan, where there was quite a large Dutch settlement.

The red men thought they had driven the white men off the Island forever; but a great many Dutchmen had arrived in New Amsterdam in the meantime. All of them, in passing up the Narrows, had, of course, seen Staten Island; and, attracted by its natural beauties, they decided to come over and settle here; and when a Dutchman makes up his mind to do a thing, he usually does it, thus originating the saying, "It is hard to beat the Dutch."

So the Dutch came to Staten Island about 1637, settled near what is now Fort Wadsworth, and called their village "Het Dorp." (The village) From this time on serious trouble from the Indians commenced. The older natives were clever enough to understand that the white men wanted their land, and would take it from them by force; for the Indians with their bows and arrows were no match for the white men with their firearms, which created "lightning and thunder."

Consequently, the Indians offered to sell their lands to the white men, and as the latter discovered that they could buy the whole Island for a few trifles, such as blankets, knives, hatchets, beads, and other things of little value, they bought the land; but as the Indians could not read or write, there were constant misunderstandings between the two races. Sometimes the Indians were to blame, and sometimes the white men were; but, whenever there was a misunderstanding, there was fighting, and it usually commenced by the Indians surprising the settlers at night; burning their homes, killing or stealing their cattle, and murdering the men, women and children. The Dutch would send soldiers from New Amsterdam, and they in turn would burn the Indian villages, kill as many Indians as possible, and force them to make peace. This continued for nearly fifty years.

In the meantime more white men settled on Staten Island, and so many Indians had been killed that those remaining wisely concluded to make peace for good and forever; and a great council was held in which the Indians finally sold their lands for the last time, and to show that they intended to give up their lands and their woods, they handed the white men a piece of sod and a small twig of every kind of wood growing on Staten Island, except the hickory and the ash, which they reserved, presumably to make bows and arrows. The Indians received in pay some blankets, knives, axes and beads.

Among the many wars which were fought, three deserve special mention.

THE PEACH WAR

This war was caused by one Van Dyck, the Attorney-General of the New Netherland, who lived on Staten Island during the summer. Looking out of his window one morning, and seeing an Indian woman picking some peaches from a tree in his garden, he became enraged, took a gun from the wall and shot the woman dead. The Indians were very angry at this murder. They went to New Amsterdam and demanded of the Governor that Van Dyck should be delivered to them so he might be punished by them. As this meant the death of Van Dyck, the Governor refused to surrender him, and the Indians, now thoroughly aroused, came back to Staten Island and murdered the Dutch settlers, burnt their houses and destroyed their crops. There were about sixty families.

THE PIG WAR

Another time, some pigs were the cause of a war which caused much bloodshed.

It appears that a ship on its way from New Amsterdam to the Delaware, where there was a large settlement of Dutch, stopped at the "Watering Place," about where Tompkinsville is located, in order to take on board some fresh water from a spring which had an excellent reputation.

The sailors, seeing some pigs near the place where they went to get the water, stole them, took them on board and sailed away. The owners of the pigs discovering the loss, concluded the Indians must have stolen them, and accused them of the theft. This, of course, they denied; but the Dutch Governor at New Amsterdam, sent some soldiers to Staten Island to punish the Indians. The latter, when attacked, defended themselves, and after a number of them had been killed, they in turn attacked the farmers, burnt their dwellings and barns, ran off with their cattle, and killed as many settlers as they could, until they were compelled to make peace.

THE WHISKEY WAR

Another time a war was caused by whiskey. A Dutch governor named Kieft had started a whiskey distillery at what is now New Brighton (the first in America). The Indians had learned to drink whiskey from the white men, and the Dutch traders having discovered, as many others have since, that they could take advantage of men when they are drunk, proceeded to get the Indians in that condition and then swindled them in an outrageous manner. When the Redskins became sober, they accused the Dutch traders of having robbed them of their furs, and when the Dutch refused to make good the losses, the latter went on the war path and again murdered nearly all the Dutch farmers and burnt their homes to the ground, continuing until the soldiers again subdued them.

From this, it may be seen that to farm on Staten Island, with Indians as neighbors, was to invite hard times.

THE LAST INDIANS

By these constant conflicts with the whites, and possibly by wars with other Indians, the Aquehongas dwindled in number until comparatively few were left.

The last pure-blooded Aquehonga Indians lived at Green Ridge in 1826, and were known as Sam and Hannah and their daughter, Nancy. They were buried in the graveyard at Green Ridge and thus ends the Indian history of Staten Island. Their silent resting place is located a few yards from the large dairy barn on the old Seaman estate, now the property of Mr. George W. White.

THE DUTCH PERIOD

After the discovery of America by Columbus, the Spaniards took possession of nearly all of South America, Central America and the West Indian Islands, and even a part of North America.

They found great wealth of gold and silver in Mexico and Peru. This attracted the attention of every European Nation which soon had ships sailing the seas in almost every direction, trying to discover new lands which they might take possession of in the hope of finding treasure.

The next door neighbors of the Spaniards, the Portuguese, took possession of Brazil, in South America; the French conquered Canada; the English settled Virginia and New England. Even the Scotch and Swedes made attempts to establish colonies in America—the former in Central America and the latter on the Delaware.

The Dutch were a very powerful Nation at that time, and they, like the rest of the nations, started out on expeditions to discover new countries which they might settle.

The main hope of all these nations was to find gold and silver; but they soon learned that Spain had already taken possession of the only countries where the precious metals were to be found. Consequently, the only advantage which they could immediately derive from their discoveries, was from commerce with the Indians; and about the only thing the Indians had to offer in exchange for the European goods, were the furs of wild animals. Furs were then, as they are now, very valuable, and the fur trade continued for a long time to be the principal and most profitable article of commerce.

It has been told in the early part of this history that Henry Hudson on his ship, the "Half Moon," discovered Staten Island in 1609, and then sailed up the Bay to Manhattan, and thence up the Hudson. In exchange for the goods he brought along, he obtained quite a large supply of valuable furs, but no gold and silver. He took possession of the country in the name of the Dutch Government and called it "New Netherlands." When he returned to Holland and reported his discovery, and told about the Indians, the Dutch merchants in Amsterdam decided to fit out some more ships to engage in the fur trade; and the Dutch Government decided to establish a settlement, or colony, in the country discovered by Hudson. The next year another ship was sent to New Netherlands, and a regular settlement was established on Manhattan Island, and in honor of the Capital of Holland, the location was called New Amsterdam.

Later, another settlement was founded, far up the Hudson River, where Albany now stands, called Fort Orange, and gradually the whole country between the Connecticut and Delaware Rivers, was taken possession of by the Dutch, and was called New Netherlands and a large number of villages or settlements were founded by them. Most of them were given Dutch names, such as New Amsterdam, Hoboken, Weehawken, Staaten Eylandt, Fort Orange (now Albany) Bruikelen (now Brooklyn), etc., and some of them received Indian names, such as Poughkeepsie, Nyack, etc. The Hudson River was called the North River, and the Delaware, along their Southern boundary, was called the South River.

Now, as the Dutch have been an important element in the early history of Staten Island, it should be remembered that Holland, at the time of the discovery

of America and for a few hundred years afterward, was a very powerful nation, which had reached a high state of development in nearly all human occupations. They were skilful, and the leading manufacturers of Europe; they had men of great learning; they were great painters; their merchants were powerful, and they were the masters of the sea. Their fight for liberty against Spain had made them the heroes of their age. They were a most peaceful, but a most determined race of men, whose main characteristic, according to the famous Italian, De Amici, was "phlegmatic energy." Their coming to North America and the establishment of the New Netherlands had an important effect on the future development of our country.

Among the early settlers in New Amsterdam was Michael Pauw, who on the promise to establish settlements, obtained a grant from the Dutch Government to land in New Jersey, where Jersey City now stands, and also on Staten Island, with the understanding, however, that he must pay the Indians for the land. He carried out his bargain with the Government. He established a settlement in New Jersey, which he called "Commune de Pauw," or in English, Village of Pauw. It still goes by the name of Communepau. He never established a settlement on Staten Island, evidently because he did not think it was worth the trouble and expense. He accordingly abandoned his claim to it after paying the Indians.

The first real settler on Staten Island was Peter de Vries, who bought it from the Government in 1636, after Michael Pauw's abandonment.

De Vries established a village at what is now Arrochar, and a number of farms were started. He had

trouble with the Indians, his blockhouse and buildings being destroyed, and his farms devastated by them.

In 1641 another Dutchman, Cornelius Melyn, obtained a further grant of land, and he also had his share of Indian warfare. His settlement was demolished, the houses were burnt and the crops destroyed, during one of the wars referred to in the "Indian period."

Not discouraged by their constant failures, a further effort at settlement was made, and about 1658 they founded another village—this time at Stony Brook, on what is now known as the Amboy Road, near New Dorp, and as there was more or less travel between the old village, called Oude Dorp (old village) near The Narrows, and the new one at "New Dorp," the road between the two villages was called the "Old Town Road," by which name it is still known.

The founders of Stony Brook were mainly Waldensians, a very religious people, who came from the mountains along the French-Italian border in Europe. They were a peaceful people, who understood better than those who had gone before them how to secure the good will and confidence of the Indians, and they consequently had the good fortune to live in peace with their Indian neighbors, with whom they did a profitable trade in furs.

At about the same time a number of Huguenots, or French Protestants, arrived and settled in the middle and southern parts of the Island, mainly in what is now known as Westfield, and around Richmond, New Springville, and Green Ridge.

At Stony Brook a church was built, where the Waldensians and Huguenots worshipped. A store was also built there, and also a court house and a

jail. This was the first sign of an established government on Staten Island. The ruins of these buildings are still to be seen and the memories of the place were revived by the Hudson-Fulton celebration in September, 1909. An association has been organized, whose object is to erect a monument on the site of the Waldensian Church in the near future.

With the establishment of Stony Brook, a more peaceful development of Staten Island commenced. Farms were established in different parts of the Island by the Dutch and the Huguenots, and the Island gradually improved.

In the meantime, however, matters of great importance to the new settlements in New Netherlands were transpiring. Holland, the great sea power of the age, was at war with a growing maritime power—England.

The wars between European powers were usually transferred to their colonies in America, and sea-fights to wrest from each other their colonies, were carried on in American waters.

Thus in 1661, while Peter Stuyvesant was the Dutch Governor in New Amsterdam, a British fleet sailed through The Narrows, and demanded, at the mouth of its cannons, the surrender of the Dutch colony of the New Netherlands.

Unable to defend himself against an attack of the British men-of-war, Peter Stuyvesant was compelled to surrender the Dutch colonies in North America to the English, and Staten Island, together with the rest of New Netherlands, fell into the hands of the English, and became a part of the British colony, the name of which was then changed to "New York," in honor of the Duke of York, who became the master of the new English colony.

Nine years after this event, a Dutch fleet put in an appearance and took possession of the colony again, and the Dutch were once more masters of the New Netherlands; but when peace was declared between England and Holland, a few years later, the Dutch colonies were again surrendered to England by treaty; and thus ends the Dutch period of the New Netherlands, and also the Dutch period for Staten Island.

The Dutch and Huguenot settlers were fortunately treated with every consideration by their new masters; their customs, languages, and religious worship were not interfered with, and they were gradually absorbed after generations, by the Anglo-Saxon influence.

Our Dutch and Huguenot ancestors have plainly left the impression of their character upon the minds of those who have studied the history of our Island. The name of the Island remains the same; the names of many places, such as Great Kills, Fresh Kills, Huguenot, Achter Kill (corrupted into Arthur Kill), Kill Van Kull, Robbens Reff (seal rock, corrupted into Robbin's Reef) and so on, remind us of them, and a long list of Dutch and Huguenot names, still numerously represented by families living here, are evidence of their descent from those noble ancestors.

ENGLISH COLONIAL PERIOD

One of the first acts performed by the new English Governor, Richard Nicoll, in the name of the Crown of England, was to take formal possession of Staten Island. This was done, near the present Fort Wadsworth, overlooking The Narrows. He made a number of grants of land on Staten Island to settlers; and from these, called "Colonial Grants," most of the land titles took their origin.

Governor Nicoll's successor was Governor Lovelace, and one of the important acts performed by him, connected with local history, was the last purchase of the Island from the Indians.

Staten Island, as has been shown in the previous pages, was purchased repeatedly from the Indians by the Dutch, in accordance with the requirements of the Dutch Government at home; but as there were always some Indians who claimed not to have joined in the sales, Governor Lovelace decided once and forever to settle the native claims, and in making his purchase he made every Indian—men and women and even boys and girls of 12 to 15 years of age, sign the deed.

In payment, the Indians received wampum, 30 shirts, 30 kettles, 20 guns, some lead, powder, knives and axes. By this sale the Indians forever parted with their claim to Staten Island.

The English, on taking possession of the Island, established a regular form of Government, and Staten Island became the County of Richmond, in the Colony of New York, and Stony Brook, near New Dorp, was the County Seat.

The Colony of New York embraced all of New Netherlands, extending from the Delaware River, which was called the "South River," to Connecticut,

and up the Hudson River, called by the Dutch the "North River."

About 1668, Lord Berkeley received a grant from the crown to all lands west of the Hudson River, which he called Nova Caesarea, or New Jersey, and at first Staten Island was considered as a part of New Jersey and paid taxes to that colony; but a dispute arising between the Duke of York and Lord Berkeley as to the ownership of Staten Island, and other islands in the mouth of the Hudson River, it was decided that all islands which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should belong to New York, all others to New Jersey.

The task of sailing around Staten Island was assigned to Christopher Billopp, who, in his sloop, the "Bentley," circumnavigated the Island in a few minutes less than 24 hours, and thus saved the Island for the Duke of York. Christopher Billopp was rewarded by a grant of about 1163 acres of land at the extreme south end of the Island, and he there built a house which is still standing, and which is called the "Bentley Manor," in honor of the ship owned by Billopp.

After Governor Lovelace came Governor Andros, and after him Governor Dongan, an Irishman, afterwards the Earl of Limerick. Governor Dongan was very fond of Staten Island, and lived in his castle overlooking the Kill Van Kull, at what is now known as West New Brighton, near the present Dongan street. He had a shooting lodge, near Castleton Corners, and the road which led from there to the Castle or Manor of Governor Dongan was and is still called "Manor Road."

The Island was divided into four towns. That surrounding the castle or manor of Governor Dongan, was called Castletowne, embracing what was the vil-

lage of New Brighton (now the first ward), Northfield (now the third ward), Southfield (now the 4th ward) and Westfield (now the fifth ward). (The town of Middletown, now the second ward, was not organized until 1866. It is composed of parts of Castleton and Southfield.)

In 1683 the inhabitants were counted, and it was shown that there were about 200 farmers and 2,000 Indians. The latter gradually died off, partly due to wars among themselves and partly due to disease.

In 1729 the County Seat was removed from Stony Brook to what was then called Cuckoldstown, which was later and now is called Richmond, in the centre of the Island, the main reason being that it could easily be reached from all parts, and because "there was a bell at St. Andrew's Church, which was thought to add dignity to the place."

In the meantime the Island continued to develop peacefully. The inhabitants were mostly farmers and numbered about 3,000.

Nothing of especial interest transpired on Staten Island, except such historical events as occurred in the Colony of New York; as for instance the wars with France, which from its possessions in Canada was more or less constantly trying to gain possession of the Colony of New York.

REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

About the middle of the eighteenth century, a general feeling of unrest commenced to make itself felt in all parts of the American Colonies, owing to the oppression of the English Government.

Taxes of all kinds were imposed upon the Americans, and laws were inaugurated in England, which were not to the tastes of the Colonies, and when their protests received no attention nor consideration, a general spirit of rebellion against the mother country became more and more pronounced, until finally in 1774, a congress of the American Colonies assembled in Philadelphia, to determine what steps should be taken.

The King of England expected to crush the opposition by sending an army to America, and as was expected, the colonists prepared for armed resistance.

At Lexington, in the State of Massachusetts, the first blood was shed, and the battle of Bunker Hill, near Boston, where the Americans covered themselves with glory, was fought.

George Washington, of Virginia, was made commander of the American forces, by the Congress of the American Colonies, and a large army was sent to America from England to subdue the revolting colonies.

In 1776 over 100 English ships anchored in the Bay, and a large army of English and Hessian soldiers, under General William Howe, took possession of Staten Island and fortified all the important points, such as Fort Hill, Richmond, Holland's Hook, Blazing Star (now Rossville), Bently Manor (now Tottenville), and a number of other places, to protect themselves against the Americans, who assembled in large numbers on the New Jersey shore. For the purpose

of making a last effort to bring about peace, General Howe met Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Edward Rutledge, representatives of the American Congress, in the Billopp house, Tottenville; but nothing came of it and the war continued in earnest. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, and was read by General Howe a few days later at his headquarters in the Rose and Crown farm house in New Dorp, where the British forces were encamped. He remarked that "That document has been signed by very determined men."

The Americans made frequent attacks on Staten Island, but owing to the large British force located here, they were unable to accomplish much, but committed acts of great bravery such as for instance battles in Richmond and the storming of old St. Andrews Church, in the fall of 1776, and again in August, 1777, the English soldiers having fortified themselves in the church on both occasions.

Another determined attack was made by the American General, Sullivan, who came over from New Jersey with his command and fought gallantly; also by Lord Stirling, who engaged the Loyalists at Pelton's Cove, West New Brighton, and other points and then both returned to New Jersey, after having inflicted serious injury on the English.

Among other interesting episodes of the war, was the capture of Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Billopp, a Loyalist officer, who was taken prisoner in his own house at the Manor of Bently by the Americans who had watched his house for days from the steeple of a church in Perth Amboy, across the Staten Island Sound (still standing).

In the meantime, within sight of Staten Island, the battle of Long Island was fought, in which the

Americans were defeated and New York was taken possession of by the English. The courage and determination of General Washington and the American Army, in the end, won victory over the English. The great battles of Saratoga, and Yorktown, in which the English were defeated, finally won the liberty of the American colonies, and on November 25, 1783, the British army and navy passed through The Narrows on its way to England. In passing Staten Island, a last parting cannon shot was fired at the Americans, who had assembled on the Heights overlooking the Narrows at Fort Wadsworth, to see the English depart for good, and who in their demonstration of joy and happiness probably provoked a feeling of resentment on the part of the departing Englishman.

THE MODERN PERIOD

After the English had left, the American colonies—now free and independent—set to work to organize the New Government. It was probably the most critical period in American History, owing to the many differences of opinion as to the form of Government which should be adopted. The American nation was brought to the brink of disaster, but in the end the good, common sense of the people prevailed, and the plan of Government, which has safely guided our destiny so far, was adopted.

Staten Island, known as the County of Richmond, organized its local government and continued to prosper as the most southerly county of the great state of New York.

The inhabitants of Staten Island were mainly farmers and fishermen, but about 1837, the many beauties of nature began to attract the attention of rich merchants of New York, and they bought land here for summer residences.

Thomas Davis purchased a large tract of land between the old Quarantine at Tompkinsville and Sailors' Snug Harbor, on the North Shore. He constructed a fine highway, called Richmond Terrace, erected a number of fine dwellings, mostly in the Colonial style of architecture, and built a large residence which, in later years became known as "The Pavilion." He named the new settlement "New Brighton," after Brighton, the famous seaside resort in England. Staten Island soon became the fashionable center for rich New Yorkers and Southerners during the summer, and many beautiful and expensive homes were built. With the development of steam navigation, ferries were established between New York and different points on

Staten Island and the population grew rapidly in numbers.

In 1858 an event took place which caused much excitement. It was the burning of the old Quarantine hospital at Tompkinsville by citizens of the county, who, after having protested in vain against the presence of a yellow fever hospital in their midst, took the law into their own hands and applied the torch. The State of New York thereupon built two artificial islands in the lower bay—called Hoffman and Swinburne Islands—and transferred the hospitals to these islands—charging the expense to the County of Richmond.

In 1860, Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, a native of Staten Island and the owner of the ferries between New York and the East Shore, built a railroad from Clifton to Tottenville.

During the Civil War Staten Island furnished its share of soldiers, many of whom laid down their lives for the preservation of the Union.

About 1880, Erastus Wiman came to Staten Island, and believing in its commercial advantages, secured control of the railroad between Clifton and Tottenville. He then built the Rapid Transit Railroad along the shore from South Beach to Holland's Hook, and in place of the many ferries, established one between St. George and New York. A large railroad bridge which spans the Sound, was erected through Mr. Wiman's influence, giving Staten Island direct rail connection with the railroad system on the Mainland.

In 1895, the present system of electric street cars was introduced.

In 1898 Staten Island became a part of the City of New York, under the name of the Borough of Richmond.

In 1900, the Municipal ferry between St. George and Manhattan was started, and later another ferry between Manhattan and Stapleton, but this was finally abandoned.

There were many other important events on Staten Island which cannot be mentioned through lack of space.

Among the many prominent men who lived on Staten Island were Aaron Burr, Vice-President of the United States; Daniel D. Tompkins, Vice-President of the United States; Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, the founder of the Vanderbilt family; Garibaldi, the Italian Liberator; Santa Anna, a former President of Mexico; Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American philosopher; Nathaniel Hawthorn; George William Curtis, Erastus Brooks, and other literary men, Bill Nye, the great humorist; Erastus Wiman, commercial and industrial promotor; William Winter, the famous critic and others prominent in the history of our Country.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion let it be said that Staten Islanders may well be proud of their little island.

Where in the American continent is there a place more favored by nature than Staten Island? Its beautiful hills, commanding views of the ocean, its picturesque valleys, its magnificent forests, its pretty lakes, its sea shores, its climate, tempered by the proximity of the ocean, all combine to make it an ideal place for human habitation.

Those who live here love it, and the thoughts of those who have left it often turn with an affectionate memory to the happy days spent among its hills and forests.

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