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WASHINGTON'S
HEADQUARTERS

NEW YORK

A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY
OF THE MORRIS MANSION
(OR JUMEL MANSION) IN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK,
USED BY WASHINGTON AS
HIS HEADQUARTERS IN 1776

BY

REGINALD PELHAM BOLTON

Published by

The American Scenic and Historic
Preservation Society

New York, 1903

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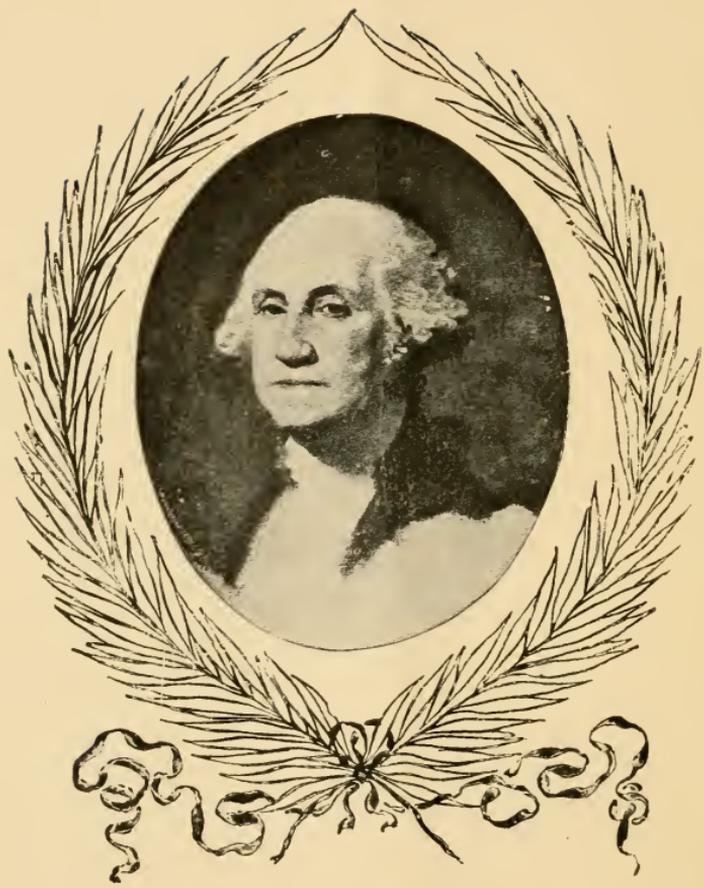
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to

H. Carrington Bolton

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Introduction.

With the destruction by fire in 1902 of the old Century House, which stood on the west shore of the Harlem River, about on the line of what would be 213th street, and with the demolition of the old Martyrs' Prison or Hall of Records in City Hall Park in March, 1903, there remain on Manhattan Island only three notable architectural relics of the Colonial period.

The oldest of these is Fraunces' Tavern, at Pearl and Broad streets, in which Washington bade farewell to his officers December 4, 1783. It was built in the early 1700's. Chiefly through the efforts of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society and its Women's Auxiliary, the Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance January 27, 1903, to create a public park for the purpose of preserving this building. Its safety is thus assured.

The youngest of the three is St. Paul's Chapel, at Broadway and Vesey streets, the cornerstone of which was laid in 1764. This edifice, the property of Trinity Church Corporation, has fortunately been preserved in architecture practically as it was when the subjects of George II and George III worshipped in it before the Revolution, and when Washington and his contemporaries worshipped in it afterwards. The public has no apprehensions concerning the future of this edifice.

Between these two, in order of erection, is the so-called Morris or Jumel Mansion, situated between 162d street, Edgecomb avenue, 160th street and Jumel Terrace, which was Washington's headquarters in 1776. It was begun in 1756 and finished in 1758. Realizing that under private ownership this beautiful specimen of classic colonial architecture and interesting historical building was not safe from the vicissitudes of fortune, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, in conjunction with its Women's Auxiliary and other historical and patriotic organizations, has made an earnest effort to secure municipal ownership of the mansion and the land upon which it stands. This effort would have been successful ere this but for a legal technicality. On March 6, 1901, the Board of Public Improvements approved and recommended to the Municipal Assembly an ordinance for "laying out a public park on the land bounded by Edgecomb road, West One Hundred and Sixtieth street, Jumel terrace, and West One Hundred and Sixty-second street, in the Twelfth ward, Borough of Manhattan, City of New York." On December 17th the Municipal Council adopted the ordinance, and on December 31st the Board of Aldermen adopted it in concurrence. On January 1, 1902, a new municipal administration came into office under an amended city charter, and when this ordinance, with others, came before the new mayor, the Hon. Seth Low, for consideration, he felt constrained by the advice of the Corporation Counsel, to withhold his approval, as stated in the following letter :

" CITY OF NEW YORK,
" OFFICE OF THE MAYOR, *January 16, 1902.*

" E. H. HALL, ESQ., *Secretary American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Tribune Building, Park Row, City:*

" DEAR SIR—Referring to your letter of the 2d inst., the Mayor asks me to say that the ordinance to lay out a public park in the Twelfth ward, borough of Manhattan, to which you referred, was sent to the Board of Aldermen yesterday without the Mayor's approval; because, under an opinion of the corporation counsel affecting all of the ordinances adopted by the municipal assembly on the last day of the year, it seemed safer to allow the matters to come up anew. This disapproval was, of course, based upon a technicality in the law, and not upon the merits, and the Mayor will be glad to consider the matter upon the merits if it comes before him again.

" Very truly yours,

" JAMES B. REYNOLDS,

" *Secretary.*"

The recent death of the occupant, Gen. Ferdinand P. Earle, and the prospective change of ownership, make it eminently desirable that the building should be taken under municipal care at once and its security and integrity as one of the notable antiquities of the city established beyond further doubt. Such action will give effect to the intention of the Municipal Government expressed in the ordinance of December, 1901, which was evoked by a strong public sentiment and against the merits of which not a single voice was raised in opposition.

NEW YORK, APRIL 19, 1903.

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WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS NEW YORK CITY

I.

THE DUTCH AND ENGLISH LANDOWNERS OF UPPER MANHATTAN PRIOR TO 1756

STANDING upon a commanding eminence, between 162d street, Edgecomb avenue, 160th street and Jumel Terrace, in the Borough of Manhattan, New York City, is a beautiful specimen of classic colonial architecture, built as a family mansion in 1758 by Col. Roger Morris. Although referred to in common parlance as the Morris Mansion, or Jumel Mansion, its distinctive honor is that it was occupied by Washington as his Headquarters in 1776, and it is therefore more properly designated as Washington's Headquarters.

This fine residence, associated in a peculiarly direct and interesting manner with the history of New York, during the Revolutionary period, now exists as the only structure, both of its kind and period, on the island of Manhattan. It has not only escaped the destruction which has been the fate of all the fine Colonial residences which at the time of its erection were dotted over

the island, but also, by reason of the good fortune of its ownership by persons of taste and patriotism, it has also escaped the equally disastrous hand of the "improver." It therefore exhibits to-day the same features which have for a full century and a half rendered it the most conspicuous building of its class in Manhattan, both in character, associations, and in its commanding location.

Its position was so well chosen that to-day, in spite of the changes of the locality and the springing up of modern dwellings in its neighborhood, it dominates the view of the lofty heights from the east and south, and forms a striking feature of interest to which the eye is led by the curves of the fine avenue and Speedway on the east. The large estate of which it once formed the centre has been parcelled off in the modern growth of the neighborhood, and of the fine, ornamental grounds at one time surrounding it only so much remains as is included in the area of two city blocks, within which the house is centrally and appropriately placed.

The range of hills on the eastern edge of which the building stands, and which is now included in the rather vaguely applied title of "Washington Heights," was, at the period of the first settlement of Manhattan, a favorite haunt and hunting place of the Indians of the tribe whose largest village was Nipinisicken, on the Riverdale hillside, north of the Spuyten Duyvil creek.

Those resident on the heights described themselves as of the Weckquaskeek, or Birchbark forest, a term indicative of the character of the wooded hills which extended between the great Iroquois (Hudson) river on the west and the placid Muscoota (Harlem) on the east, and from the Schorakapok or Spouting Spring (Spuyten Duyvil) on the north, to the salt marsh which drained the plains, afterwards known by the name of Harlem.

The early settlers of that township, regarding the almost inaccessible heights as so much mere wild woodland, set them aside as common lands in which all burghers had equal rights of pasturage and forestry. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, the line of hills had been opened up to access by the completion of a postroad. This thoroughfare was begun in 1673, and, probably following an Indian trail, was carried up to the summit on the easterly slope, on a steep grade which afterwards earned the appropriate title of Break-neck Hill. Thence it passed the site of the future Morris house, along the present line of Kingsbridge road and Broadway, down to the Muscoota marshes, swarming with muskrats, and after skirting the river came to a point in the Spuyten Duyvil creek at which the low tide exposed a shallow spot known as the "wading place."

Attention being thus drawn to the locality, its cultivable portions were soon coveted by such of the sons of the settlers of the lowlands as were unprovided with landed property.

By informal consent of the freeholders of Harlem, expressed through their magistrate, constable and clerk, an arrangement was made to lease a portion of the Heights, at that time referred to as Jochem Pieter's Hill and the Long Hill, respectively the portions from 129th street to about 179th street, and from thence north to the line of 200th street.

This lease was entered into by the son of Kier Walters, a Harlem farmer, the young man adopting, as was often the Dutch custom, his father's Christian name as his own surname and being known to his neighbors as Jan Kiensen.

Kiensen and his father-in-law thus became the lessees

in 1682, for a term of twelve years, of a large area of half-cleared land known as the Indian Field or Great Maize Land, extending south of 181st street along the hill-top probably as far as 165th street.

Ere the lease had run its course, the demands of others for similar privileges led to an agitation in favor of a comprehensive partition of the commonlands, and petitions were presented to the governing authorities for authority to effect this purpose.

This necessary action being a long process, the burghers in 1691 determined on a mutual partition among the freeholders by lot, and Kiersen appears to have abandoned his lease, and to have stood back to see the result of the luck of the town fathers.

The lead was set by the Schepen or magistrate, Joost Oblinus, who drew by lot or favor $22\frac{3}{4}$ morgen of the Indian clearing, probably improved by Kiersen's labors, at a point just south of 181st street.

That portion of the uplands which comprised the site of the Morris house, was included in lots numbered 16 and 18, and fell respectively to the ownership of freeholders by name of Holmes and Waldron.

This partition appears to have been decided on mainly for the purpose of providing a means of livelihood to the younger members of the Harlem families, for Oblinus settled his younger son Hendrick on his allotment, and the lot of Holmes and part of that of Waldron were, before 1694, acquired by Thomas Teurneur, the son of a Harlem magistrate; he in turn, on July 2, of that year, transferred the property to Jan Kiersen, who thus became possessed, after eight years of unsettled life, of that portion of the coveted uplands which was destined to become associated with so much of the future history of the locality, as well as of the country at large.

Moved by a desire to build a house for himself and his young family, Kiersen appears to have waited for several years in hopes of a confirmation, by authority of the Governor, of the partition which formed his title to his property.

But becoming impatient, he in 1700 procured a deed of consent by the freeholders which on the 7th of March of that year permitted him to "take a half-morgen of land from the common woods, on which to have a house and barn and garden," but stipulating that he should leave the space for a suitable road as the King's Way between his house and the lot of Samuel Waldron. Further efforts were made to move the government to action by petition in 1709, but, it was not until 1712 that Governor Richard Dongan issued that authorization of the partition which had been so long desired by the short-sighted and land-hungry settlers. The decree or charter, ignoring previous action, provided for a drawing of the land by lot, a process carried out by the then existing freeholders in a spirit of mutual consideration for the semi-established rights of the squatters tenures.

Previous to this date, in fact before 1707 when the line of the post-road was surveyed, Kiersen and young Oblinus had each built a house upon his land, and the survey recites that after passing the half-way house the roadway ran about north to the hollow, now Manhattanville, "from thence to Barent Meyer's northeast, and thence to the run by Barent Waldron's north northeast; from thence along the fence, and so by John Kierse's house on the right-hand." The precise position was probably at 165th street on the east side of the Kingsbridge Road.

Time passed on, and during the succeeding half century the families occupying the Heights gradually brought

more of its rocky and precipitous surface under some form of cultivation; but it is noticeable that whereas those families which were settled in the marshy lowlands of the Muscoota and Harlem Plain remained longer in possession, the settlers on the unremunerative soil forming the uplands began about the period of the Revolution to part with their holdings, and have since that time scattered to other districts, so that their descendants are now rarely to be found in the neighborhood. Thus, in 1769, Oblinus sold a dwelling and 100 acres of his land at 181st street to Blazius Moore, the tobacco merchant, for the sum of £937, 10s. The Cornelissens sold property north of Holyrood church to the Kortrights of Harlem. Abraham Meyer offered 8 acres of woodland in that locality for sale in 1768. The Bussings sold land in that section to John Bernard Bauer of Frankfort, Germany. Kiersen's heirs, having sold part of a property at Inwood in 1756, appear to have sold the site of the Morris House to Roger Morris also in 1756, and a large part of the remainder to James Carroll in 1763. The price paid for this latter large property was but £1,000.*

*Kiersen's holdings amounted in all to about 90 acres, and he had also acquired from Waldron, as early as 1703, a piece of salt marsh, that coveted possession of a Dutch farmer, being part of the lowlands of Inwood.

His family consisted of two sons, John and Abraham, and a daughter, Jannetje, who married Jacob Dyckman and became the ancestress of that well-known Inwood family.

The date of the decease of Jan Kiersen is not clear, but after becoming deacon, town collector and constable, he lived to a great age—possibly until 1749, when he would have been about 99 years old. Of the conveyance by which Roger Morris became seized of the site of the residence which he began to erect in 1756, no history gives details; it may be that owing to the fortune of war the deed was removed to England. But Riker says that Morris acquired title from Carroll, whose deed was dated Jan. 29, 1763, several years after the Morris house was built.

II.

THE MORRIS MANSION, 1756-1776.

By the middle of the eighteenth century the traffic along the post road had so increased that the beauties of the situation engaged the attention of some of the wealthier class of travelers, who stopped for rest or refreshment at the Blue Bell Tavern, which the Oblinus family had established at 181st street, or at one or other of the farmhouses between that point and the low levels north and south.

Among these observers were two young British officers holding commissions in the Colonial service, John Maunsell and Roger Morris, who both became the purchasers of land, the former about 147th street on the west side of the line of Amsterdam avenue, and the latter of Carroll's purchase.

Colonel Maunsell erected a large dwelling on his property, which he sold at some date previous to 1776 to a wealthy West Indian, Charles Aitken of St. Croix. To this building came refugees from Harlem on the occupation of that town by the British troops in 1776*, and it became a divisional headquarters to General Spencer, commanding the American forces engaged in throwing up the line of defensive earthworks across the heights at 147th street.

Roger Morris was the third son of Charles Morris of the Manor house, Wandsworth, a village now forming

*Johnstone, Battle of Harlem Heights.

part of the southwest postal district of London, in the County of Surrey. His mother was Sarah, nee Haldimand, and his birth took place Jan. 28, 1727. He obtained a commission in the British army and was ordered to the American colonies, where he soon rose in rank by his meritorious service. As a young major he was appointed to the staff of General Braddock during the French and Indian War. In this service he was associated with George Washington, their acquaintance continuing until their lots were cast on opposite sides in the great struggle for American Independence.

In 1756 he became acquainted with the family of Frederick Philipse, second lord of Philipse Manor, and visited them at their Manor House* in Philipsburg, now Yonkers, N. Y. The intimacy thus begun culminated in his engagement to marry Mary,† one of the daughters of the lord of the Manor.

*This interesting building, erected in 1682, is still standing and is one of the most ancient and picturesque antiquities of the State of New York. It is at present used as a City Hall. The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, in co-operation with the Manor Hall Association of Yonkers and the Yonkers Historical Society, has introduced a bill in the present Legislature (1903) for the purchase of the building by the State and its committal to the custody of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society.

†Mary Philipse was celebrated for her beauty and was, besides, heiress to a portion of the manorial estate, the entail of which had been at that time broken by legal procedure, and had been divided among the heirs. Her portion comprised some fifty thousand acres of land in the counties of Westchester, Dutchess and Putnam. A romantic story woven by the process of imaginative growth, has been long extant, and has frequently found a record in print, to the effect that Col. George Washington was a rival for the hand of Miss Mary, and that he was cut out by his companion in arms. No foundation exists for this interesting romance, although it is true that Washington met the young lady when she was visiting in the Highlands at the home of her sister Susanna, wife of Col. Beverly Robinson, another Virginian officer. But at this time the attentions of the future general were devoted to another lady, and Mary Philipse was probably already engaged to Morris.

Evidently in anticipation of their marriage, Morris in 1756, purchased a portion of the Kiersen estate, on the Heights, and commenced that year, the erection on the advantageous and commanding site which it afforded, of the pretentious mansion, well calculated to become the home of a lady of a family which held its head so particularly high as did that of Philipse. On the keystone of an arch in its main hall he caused to be carved the date of its completion, 1758. The date coincided with that of his marriage, which took place at Philipsburg Manor, and at which he settled upon his wife the estate and mansion, by which means it became her absolute personal property.

Resuming his military duties, the young officer found active service awaiting him in the campaign against the French. At the action of Fort Du Quesne in 1758 he received a wound from which he recovered sufficiently to be present at the taking of Quebec, in September, 1759. In the intervals of less active military service that succeeded this date, Major Morris no doubt spent much time in the charming residence overlooking the Harlem Valley, and the attractions of his home ere long decided him to abandon the unsettled life of a soldier, and to resign his commission. This he did in 1764, at the age of 37, receiving on retirement the brevet rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. His son Amherst was born in 1763, and three other children, Henry Gage Beverly, Joanna and Maria, formed the little family circle in the peaceful home, of which the fortune of civil war was ere long destined to deprive them.

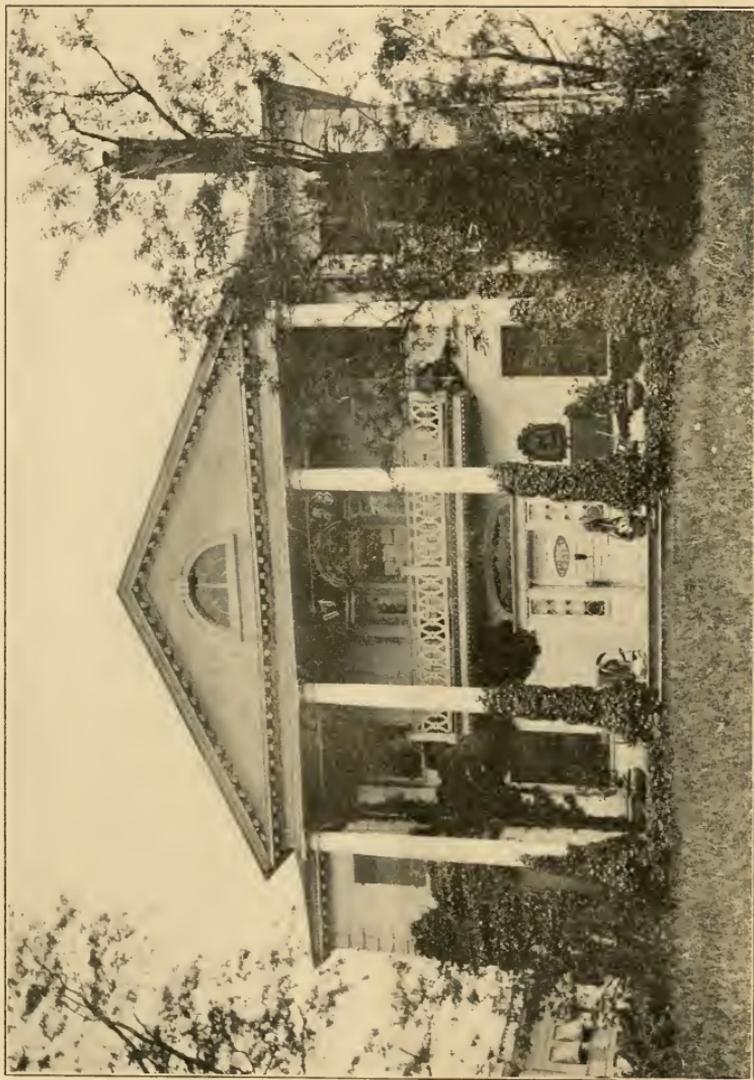
The social position of Roger and Mary Morris was of sufficient importance to engage the acquaintance of many prominent personages, and, in addition to their purely social visitors, they entertained notables so widely

differing in opinion and characteristics as Benjamin Franklin and Sir William Tryon.

A man of such position, whose military service to the Colonies had been so meritorious, was not likely to be left long without engagement in public affairs, and Col. Morris was soon appointed a member of the King's Council and took a prominent part in the affairs of the Colony.

In the troublous period, therefore, which soon succeeded, when friends and even families were hopelessly divided on the principles involved in the Revolution, Morris' views placed him on the side of that authority to which his birth, his military associations and his public office directed him.

His official position marked him out for active interest in public matters, and the rapid drift of affairs into a war-like state, which soon forced those possessed of military knowledge to take an active part, caused his re-entry into the British military service. He removed his family to a place of security, and his handsome home was left in the care of servants, at the time when the British and American forces were concentrating in New York for the struggle over its possession and defence.



WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS, 160TH STREET, NEW YORK
(The Morris, or Jumel Mansion)

III.

WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS, 1776.

Early in the momentous year 1776, the American officers engaged in the work of surveying and locating available positions of defence, were at the Morris house, the commanding position of which, seen from the valley below, attracted the attention of Generals Greene, Heath, Putnam and Knox, and on their visits the defenses of the heights were outlined, which afterwards extended in the neighborhood of the mansion. Inspections of the locality were afterwards made by Washington, and there can be no doubt that it was his observations on these occasions which caused him, on the retirement of the army from New York, and its failure to arrest the advance of the British and Hessian forces from Kip's Bay, to select his old comrade's house as his headquarters, into the occupation of which he entered on September 15, 1776.

During the succeeding critical period until November 21st, when the last official order dated therein was issued, the house was the centre of American interest and of its military authority, and in the quiet of its rooms were transacted affairs of the greatest moment, not only to the forces then engaged, but bearing upon the composition of the regular Continental Army at that time in embryo. Camped around the heights were about 8,000 men brought together as volunteers, short service militia,

short time levies, all raw, inexperienced, and held together only by the bond of a common principle and the influence of a common enthusiasm. These had to be drilled, taught, disciplined and given experience in facing an enemy, and at the same time precautions were not to be neglected for safe-guarding the wider interests of the country at large. Therefore the parlors of the house became the theatre in which were to be met during the period most of the military leaders and many of the representative men of civil life. Here was held that well-known audience at which the Stockbridge Indian Sachems attended to express their sympathies.* Here were decided many of the arrangements for the gallant work done in defending the Heights, in blocking the Hudson at Jeffrey's Hook and in the desperate attacks on the British frigates.† Hence was issued a remarkable series of general orders on the conduct in camp of an army,‡ and here was carried on that interesting correspondence of the general's aide Tench Tilghman, with William Duer of the Secret Committee of Safety.

Several references to a building known as the "White-House," near headquarters, lead to the supposition that the building referred to was on the old estate of Kiersen, and was located on the high road at the point where afterwards the Cross Keys Tavern was established, at 165th street and the Post road.

The barns of the mansion were also located some little distance to the north, and judging by the British military map and by the location of similar buildings in the survey of 1810, they were approximately on the line

* Mines, p. 230.

† Force's American Archives.

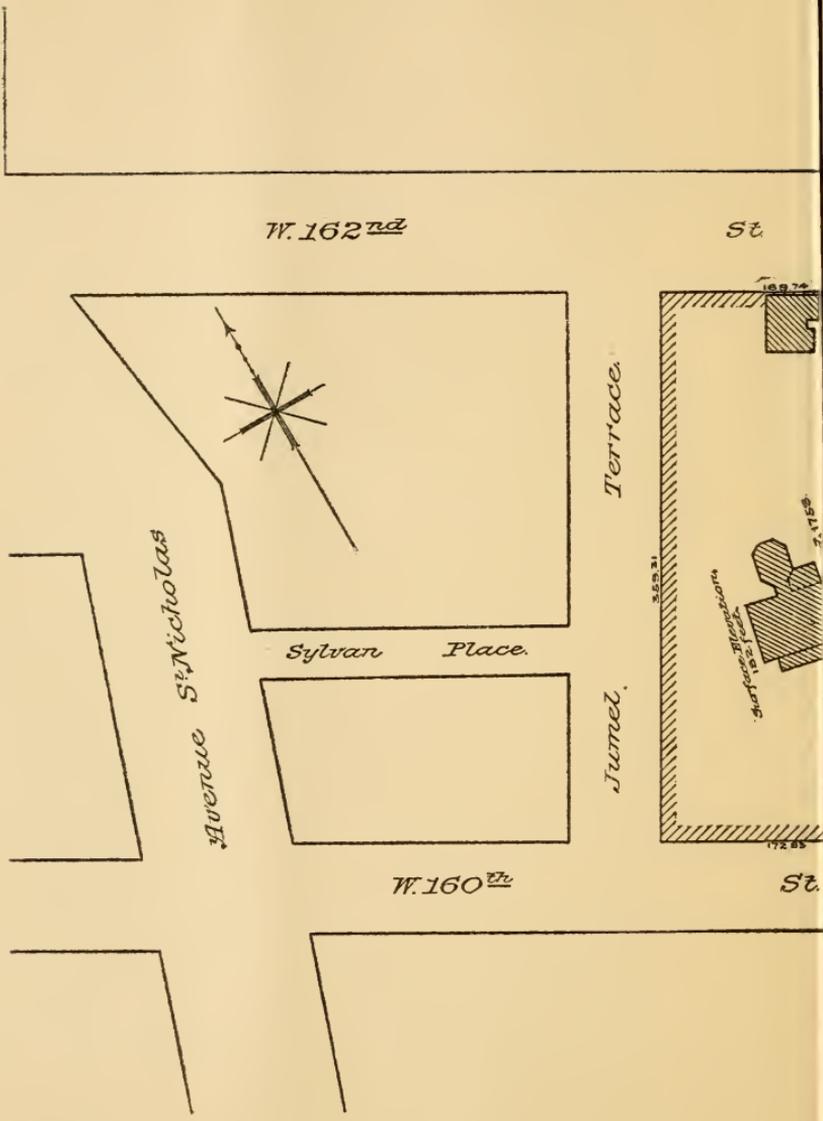
‡ Ditto, V., 4th series.

of 165th street, near Edgecomb avenue. These were the buildings within which were stabled the mounts of the commander and his aides, and which were afterwards used as a temporary prison for the officers captured on November 16 by the British.

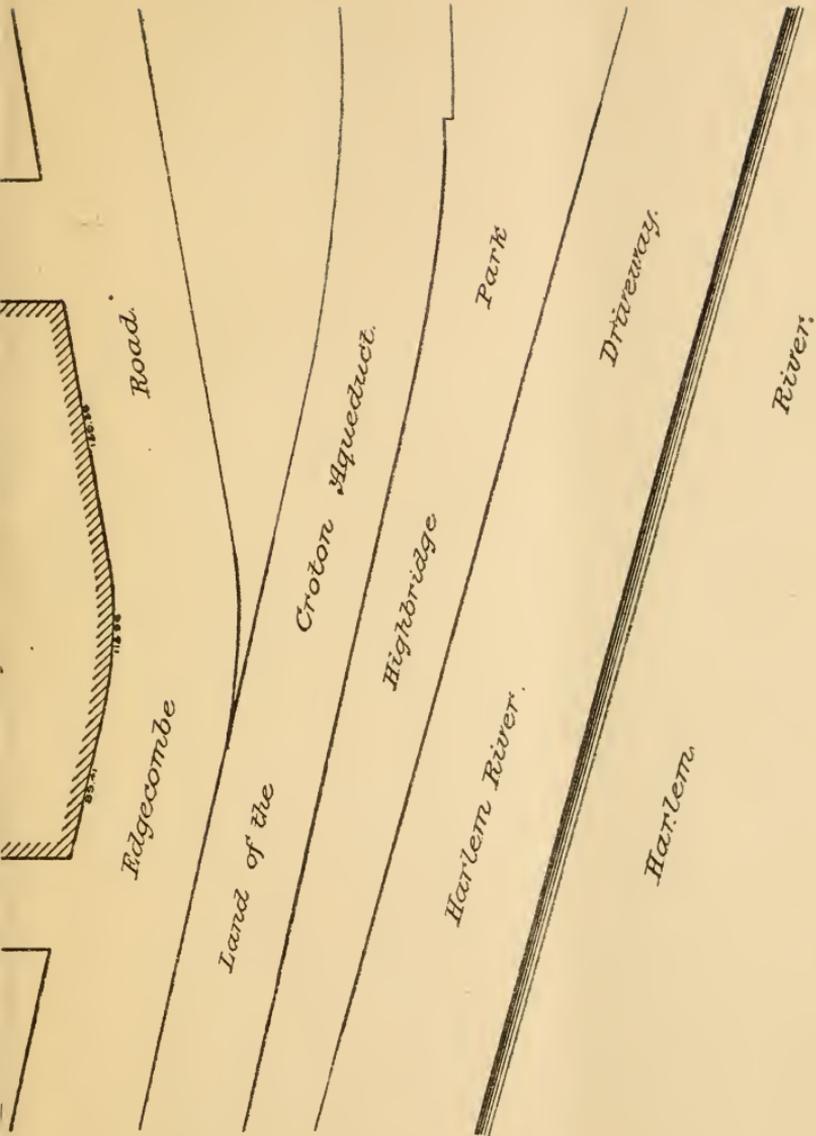
The approach to the mansion was from a point on the Post road about parallel with its southern frontage, which is now covered by a curious collection of frame dwellings known as Sylvan Place. On either side of the driveway were ranged rough wooden huts of the troops quartered close to the headquarters. Westward from the high road and a little north of the entrance gates was extended a line of earthworks, known in the scheme of defence of the heights as No. 3 line.

On the withdrawal of the American army to the north in order to escape the trap set by Howe's encircling operation in Westchester county, the Headquarters Mansion was left in the possession of Colonel Robert Magaw, who was detailed as post-commander with a garrison of about 2,600 men. After the engagements at Pell's Point and White Plains, the British and Hessian forces were concentrated around Washington Heights and on Nov. 15 its surrender was demanded and refused. On Nov. 16 a grand assault was directed on the position by four columns, north, south, and two acting from the east. Just at the commencement of the action Washington, accompanied by Greene, Mercer and Israel Putnam, arrived at the Morris house for the purpose of observation, but finding the forces on both sides fully engaged, were unable to effect any re-arrangement, and retired just in time to avert a capture, which would, had it occurred, have practically decided the Revolution adversely to the patriotic cause.

The Morris house now became the center of military



SITE OF PRO



LOSED PARK.

operations from the south and east. The lines of defences to the south extended across the heights at three points. The first or advanced line was between 147th and 148th streets; the second was at 153d and 155th streets; and the third, already described, and at that time still in an incomplete condition, commenced at the present junction of Amsterdam avenue and St. Nicholas avenue and extended east between 161st and 162d streets to Broadway, thence in a zig-zag form across Fort Washington avenue, and round the hill where the Boulevard Lafayette turns westward from 158th street.

On the advance line was posted a force of about 800 men, under Lt.-Colonel Lambert Cadwalader, commanding the 3d Pennsylvania battalion, a detachment of 110 men of the Connecticut "Congress's Own" Rangers, acting as scouts and marksmen, and a company of militia brought up during the engagement.

The anticipation of an attack had brought the little American force of defence early to their stations, and a group of officers was observing the movements of the British forces from the lofty land near the Headquarters house, when between 7 and 8 o'clock the first shot was fired, directed at them from the field battery across the Harlem river. The projectile fell short only by a few yards, and its firing was the signal for the opening of a fierce artillery attack upon the eastern flank of the hillside as far north as the present Fort George.

In rather leisurely style the southerly division of attack advanced in two columns, one from Harlem and the other from Bloomingdale, arriving at Manhattanville about 10 A. M., and overwhelming the advanced outposts in little breastworks on the southerly edge of the heights. Driving in the pickets, the British division advanced along the line of the Post road, and the Hessian

brigade came up the westerly side, both advancing upon the line of earthworks, where a bloody resistance would undoubtedly have been met but for an occurrence which placed the American forces in a position of great disadvantage.

The American generals had but just observed the condition of the southern defence, and had found no particular means by which it could be bettered, when word was hastily brought to the Headquarters and passed on to Cadwalader of the embarkment of a regiment on the Morrisania side of the Harlem, and its evident intention to land upon the east of the Morris House and to take the defending force in the rear. Detaching a little half company under acting Major David Lennox, from his own regiment, with orders to hold this new danger in check, Cadwalader retired his force to the second line of defences at 155th street, where he would have a better opportunity to withdraw if the attack in the rear succeeded.

The force proved to be the well-known 42d Regiment of Highlanders, 800 strong, under the command of their Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Stirling. Their boats, rowed by men of the Royal Navy, started from a little creek in the line of 173d street, the mouth of which is still to be traced at low tide. The Highlanders landed, probably in two parts or divisions, at similar marshy recesses on the Manhattan shore at 173d and 165th streets.

They met a fierce resistance from the handful of opponents, who, perched on the rocks and behind the trees of Speedway Park, poured a deadly fire into the boats, killing and wounding 90 men, nearly double their own number. The very ground up which the gallant Scotsmen charged against their brave opponents may still be examined in its natural condition; and the con-

tour leads to the conclusion that it was up the gorge which extended on the north side of the property of Colonel Morris that this bloody fight took place. Another company was brought up to Lennox's assistance but many more would have been necessary to stay the swarming Highlanders, who forced their way to the summit, and, sweeping around their opponents, took a number of them prisoners on the space north of the Headquarters house, Lennox's own men being pushed back to the white house still firing desperately.

The appearance of the red-coats in the immediate vicinity made the necessity apparent for the retreat of the forces at 155th street, and they retired towards the northwest, receiving and returning the fire of the Highlanders, who had taken possession of the huts near 162d street.

The British force advancing came up to the Headquarters and took possession, while the Hessian wing pressed forward on the Hudson side and advanced towards Fort Washington, a desultory fight being kept up by Cadwalader's men all the way.

Meantime some of the most westerly part of the American force had been so nearly cut off that some of their officers were captured. Among the latter was Captain Alexander Graydon, an officer who afterwards wrote a detailed personal account of these events.

It is not necessary here to give the details of the day's battle on the other parts of the field. Suffice it to say that after one of the most heroic defences in the history of the war, Magaw was forced to capitulate to an overwhelmingly superior force, and about 4 o'clock the British flag was hoisted over the citadel of Fort Washington.

IV.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, 1776-1783

With the fall of Fort Washington, the Morris Mansion became the temporary Headquarters of the British Commander-in-Chief, and the permanent Headquarters of the commander of the northern defenses of the Island.

In the barn of the Mansion were confined Capt. Graydon and many other officers and men taken captive during the closing hours of the battle of November 16th.

The barn probably stood some distance to the rear or north of the house, and a building is shown on the British map of the day's military operations in such a position on a mound about on a line of 166th street. "It was," says Graydon, "a good, new building," and was no doubt that which, during the time of Washington's use of the dwelling, had sheltered the mounts of himself and of the few aides who possessed such a luxury. Here a body of one hundred and fifty to two hundred prisoners was crowded, a motley group of officers and privates, regular and militia, continental and state, some in uniform, some without, and some in hunting shirts, showing them to be marksmen, the mortal aversion of the redcoats. Some of the officers were plundered of their hats, and others of their coats. The officer on guard was an ill-looking, low-bred fellow for a member "of this dashing corps of light infantry," as

Graydon describes him and them, and, as his prisoner stood near him at the door seeking fresh air, kept crowding and hustling the defenseless man until he expostulated, when, clubbing his fusee to strike his prisoner, he exclaimed : "Not a word, sir, or I'll give you my butt."

"As to see the prisoners was a matter of some curiosity, we were complimented with a continual succession of visitors, chiefly officers of the British Army," some of whom were present when, later in the day, a Sergeant Major came to take formal account of those captured. This may be assumed to have been during the time when the advance of the British awaited the result of the Hessian attack then proceeding on the north, and when officers would be coming and going between the front and headquarters.

As the Sergeant sat with his pen in his hand and his paper on his knee, he applied to each officer in turn for a description of his rank, without actual insolence, but, as his one-time prisoner records, with "that animated dega-gue impudence which belongs to a self-complacent non-commissioned officer of the most arrogant army in the world."

A little, squat militia officer, from York County, Penn., who had lost his three-cornered beaver, and had received in exchange only the crown of a dirty old hat, when asked his rank, gruffly exclaimed, "I am a keppun," at which a general laugh ensued at his expense, putting both captors and captured in a better humor.

It was a seasonably cool November day, "yet from the number of men crowded into the barn, the air within became oppressive and suffocating," a foretaste for many a poor fellow of what he was to endure, later on, in the crowded prisons of New York.

The excitements of the day, and the lack of air, produced in the prisoners an excessive thirst, "and there was a continual cry for water," to which the soldiers on guard appear to have humanely responded, bringing water in a bucket continually. But though those "who were about the door did well enough, the supply was very inadequate to such a number of mouths, and many must have suffered much."

The sounds of cannonading and musketry ceased in the afternoon, and as the early dusk shrouded the scene, the tramp of the guard was heard and the prisoners taken at Fort Washington came down the postroad and passed the Headquarters House on their way to death in the city. The prisoners in the barn were sent forward, though one detachment was kept at a farm house for three days and reached the city in a starving condition.

The change of ownership of the Heights, which succeeded, on the evening of the 16th of November, 1776, was at no point more distinctly pronounced than within the walls of the erstwhile home of Roger Morris. The rooms which had for weeks sheltered Washington, and the walls which had echoed the anxious consultations of the patriot officers, received their very antitheses in the forms of the ennobled and haughty officers of the staff of Lieutenant-General Baron Wilhelm von Knyphausen, whose blue and gold uniforms must have presented the strongest contrasts to the worn and faded habiliments of their predecessors in occupation. While the most recent occupant, Colonel Magaw, and his aides, were on their tedious march to the prisons of New York, the commanders of the mercenary troops were making themselves at home in the rooms of the mansion, which was for the succeeding years of the struggle to continue to be known as "Headquarters."

As such the building is frequently mentioned in the diary kept by Lieutenant Charles Philip von Kraaft, a Saxon officer, who refers to troops quartered around it, to a redoubt erected below the grounds on the marshy shore of the Harlem river, and to the church parades, which on Sundays were held in the barn.*

In their reconnoissance on the Westchester side in July, 1781, Washington and Rochambeau, from the Westchester side, made a critical examination of the locality with their field glasses. This was probably the first occasion on which Washington had looked on the scene of so much interest to him since the fateful November 16, 1776. He was destined, however, to visit his old Headquarters again in person upon the triumphal entry of the Americans in 1783 ; and once again in 1790 in the lofty capacity of President of the United States.

*In 1778 the Mansion bore the name of the Hessian General. Von Kraaft refers to it as " what was called General Knipphausen's quarters, Morris House." In 1781 the house was used as the dwelling of the commander of the Donop Musketeer Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel von Hinte. Hither came frequently von Kraaft, then a Free Corporal in the Colonel's own company, to report to his commander. On the 8th of October of that year there passed the house about 10 A. M., a cavalcade, the centre of which was the Prince of Wales, William Henry, who went to the front to " view the line," making a sort of parade excursion into Westchester county with a large force.

V.

HOSTELRY AND FARMERS' HOME, 1783-1810.

In 1779, the general Act of Attainder of loyalists was passed, and their properties were declared forfeited. Roger Morris was too conspicuous a character to escape inclusion, and so it came about that the mansion, together with all the landed property of both the husband and wife, were promptly put up for sale by the Commissioners of Forfeiture as soon as the British army was withdrawn from the scene.

It passed into the hands of one owner after another, being utilized for a year or more as a residence by Dr. Isaac Ledyard. The Morris family found refuge in England, where the Colonel died in 1794 at the age of 67. His plate and furniture were dispersed under the hammer in New York only the year previous to his decease.

In 1785 the interesting building fell into the occupancy of one Talmadge Hall, the proprietor of a line of stages from New York to Boston, who turned it into a hostel under the high-sounding title of Calumet Hall, and utilized it as the first stopping place after leaving this city. It is probable that the need arose for such a road house at that juncture as in that year Jacob Moore sold the Blue Bell Tavern property at 181st street to the Bauers, and that famous Inn seems to have gone out of use for several years till revived in another building on the opposite side of the postroad. Advertisements were

issued describing the advantages of the one time home of the Morris family, as a resort for social parties and for summer visitors and boarders.

Time passed on, and the building became the home of a farmer. On July 10, 1790, it was visited by a memorable party, composed of President George Washington, Vice-President John Adams, his lady, and Miss Smith; the Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson; the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton; and the Secretary of War, Henry Knox, and the ladies of the latter two. This company, with whom, we learn from Washington's diary of that date, were "all the gentlemen of my family, Mrs. Lear and the two children" [the grandson and granddaughter,] visited "the old position of Fort Washington,"—a visit which must have been full of the most interesting memories to the one-time Commander. After visiting the fort, the diary says they "dined on a dinner prepared by Mr. Mariner at the house lately Colonel Morris's, but confiscated and in occupation by a Common Farmer."

To such a modest purpose had the fine residence, once the scene of brilliant gatherings of well-known characters, and of a wealthy society now descended. But its vicissitudes were at this time by no means at an end, and its recovery of a state equal to its former grandeur was not many years distant. In 1794, on the death of Roger Morris, who had recovered some compensation from the British Government for his personal losses, his widow instituted proceedings to dispute the sale of the property under the Act of Attainder, claiming, and, as the event proved, both legally and rightfully, that the property had been her own, by virtue of prenuptial agreement—otherwise her marriage settlement. The suit dragged along until 1809, when the lady, being then

eighty years of age, sold her claims against the Government of the United States in respect to the Morris property—and presumably in respect to her own inheritance of 50,000 acres of the Philipsburg Manor—to John Jacob Astor for the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, and lived to enjoy the income of this modest residue of her once vast estate, until the age of ninety-six. She died in London on 18th July, 1825, still estranged from her native land and from the friends and society of her youth. Of her children whose early days were spent in the mansion and playing around its spacious grounds and woodlands, it is interesting to note that Amherst became a Commander of the Royal Navy and died without issue April 29, 1802, at the age of 39, while his brother Henry, who bore also the name of Gage, after the unsuccessful British Commander, and of Beverly after that of his uncle Robinson, rose to higher rank as a Rear Admiral and left some family, of whom a descendant not many years ago was domiciled near the home of his ancestors. Joanna married Thomas Couper Hincks, and the younger sister Maria died unmarried, Sept. 25, 1836.

The property on which their old home stood, had before the closing year of the eighteenth century, passed into the possession of one William Kenyon, a merchant of the City of New York, who, on August 29, 1799, with Abigail, his wife, conveyed several tracts of land with the Mansion, for the sum of three thousand pounds, to Leonard Parkinson, a wealthy West Indian. Parkinson combined his purchases so that eventually he owned all the lands from river to river, from about 158th street, where the Beekman properties ended, north to those of Mrs. Bauer and Jacob Arden, or the old Oblinus southerly line at or near 173rd street.

In 1809 Parkinson decided to sell his estate and had it surveyed and divided into fifteen lots, as shown on a map by Charles Loss under date of March 1, 1810, of which lots Number 8 was that which included the "Mansion House," and its "coach house" at the north. It comprised 36 acres, 1 rood, bounded on the north by a strip of property from the postroad east to the river, which strip was owned by George Wear, the proprietor of the Cross Keys tavern at 165th street.

The whole Parkinson property was sold under power of attorney by Leonard Parkinson, son of the West Indian planter, and Number 8 passed on April 28, 1810, for the consideration of ten thousand dollars, to Stephen Jumel, with whose career we now enter the second period of interesting associations of which the Colonial Mansion was destined to become the scene.

VI.

THE STEPHEN JUMEL MANSION, 1810-1865.

Stephen Jumel was a thriving coffee planter in the Island of San Domingo, who, about 1790, was, by the insurrection of the inhabitants, forced to flee from the island with those other of the French settlers who escaped the massacre. Finding his way to New York, he had the good fortune to find awaiting his orders here a cargo of coffee which he had shipped to this port just before the sinister events occurred from which he so narrowly escaped. By the exercise of his abilities, the use of the small capital at his disposal soon developed into a large business, and Jumel in 1790 was a well-known merchant of the city, residing about the northwest corner of 5th avenue and 34th street, in a handsome frame house. About the beginning of the nineteenth century his wife died, and he married again, a lady whose romantic career and undoubtedly remarkable characteristics left a distinct impress upon the home she inhabited until her death, and upon the locality in general.

Eliza Brown, or Bowen, was a handsome young woman, around whose origin some romantic and contradictory stories have been woven. One story, quoted by Appleton's Cyclopædia of American Biography, relates that she was the daughter of a Frenchwoman named Capet, born at sea on a French frigate; that by some means she was left an orphan at Newport and reared

there by a Mrs. Thompson. The more nearly correct account is that she was one of the two daughters of John and Phoebe Bowen, and was brought up after her father's death by her stepfather, Lieutenant Jonathan Clark, of Rutland, Mass. She was born April 2d, 1777, though even of this fact other variations have appeared.

Another story as to her early career is to the effect that, when only seventeen years of age, she eloped to New York with Colonel Peter Croix, a British officer, to whom she is said to have been married, afterwards discovering when he deserted her and returned to England, that he was at the time already a married man. The story has one inexplicable feature, viz: what a British colonel was doing in Rutland (or in New York, for that matter), in the year 1794! Of equally, if not greater lack of foundation, are the romances woven around her by associating her, as has been done directly in one well-known novel, with famous public characters of the day. She is made to appear as the nominal Mrs. Croix in 1788, being then but eleven years of age, and in 1794 as the confidante of Hamilton and an ambitious intriguante in political affairs.

Whether the above have any foundation in whole or part, she seems to have entered the service of the Jumels as housekeeper in their handsome establishment, and soon after the death of his wife, Stephen Jumel, then about fifty years of age, married Eliza at the Catholic Church of St. Peter, Barclay street, April 7, 1804.

On April 28, 1810, he purchased the Roger Morris mansion and fitted it up as his residence, to be, thenceforward to our times, locally connected with his name, in spite of the superior claim of its previous associations.

The French merchant, a vigorous and courtly man,

and his wife, a handsome blonde of fine figure and carriage, were admirably suited to one another.

Madame Jumel, as she always desired to be known, was an intelligent and even brilliant woman, and her abilities soon made her the centre of much social attention. With their adopted niece they kept a hospitably open house and entertained lavishly. They counted among their guests several foreigners of importance, whose acquaintance they made when for a time residing in Paris, where the lady received considerable admiration and attention at the Napoleonic court, and where their style of living is said to have somewhat impaired her husband's fortune. It is quite as probable that the fortune declined with the general state of depression succeeding the long wars of the continent in which the merchant's interests were involved by trade with France. Jumel was an adherent of the Napoleonic idea, and was said to have offered his home on the Heights to that remarkable potentate at the time of his misfortunes.

About the year 1815 Jumel discovered in the garden of the Tuileries a large number of Egyptian cypress trees, which had been presented by the Khedive of Egypt to Napoleon, but which, in those troublous times, were in danger of neglect. He was permitted to acquire some of them, and shipped them to his American home, where they were planted around a circular walk surrounding an ornamental pond on the southwest corner of the grounds. There still remain at this day about fourteen of these interesting trees, their position being on vacant land at the east side of St. Nicholas avenue, north of 159th street, still conspicuously visible from the viaduct leading up to the Heights at 155th street.

In 1814, Jumel acquired from Gerardus Post another large tract of the Parkinson property being Number 6,

on the map previously referred to, and abutting on the old Oblinus property. In 1815 the merchant entered into a deed of settlement of the property comprised in lot Number 8, in which his wife Eliza Brown Jumel joins, conveying the property to a trustee for the life enjoyment of it by the wife, and this was followed in 1825 by another deed in which the other parties unite, and Stephen Jumel relinquishes his own interest in the property entirely, and the disposition of it is left to the direction of Mrs. Jumel, who is appointed in 1826 attorney to manage the affairs of her husband. In January 1828, Mrs. Jumel directs the conveyance of her property to her adopted niece, Mary Jumel Bownes, and May 13 of same year Miss Bownes conveys the same to a trustee for the use and behoof of Mrs. Jumel, who thus again becomes mistress of its fortunes.

Then by a deed poll November 21, 1828, the lady appoints a trustee, and conveys to him the two properties for the benefit after her decease of her husband, or in case of pre-decease, then of her adopted niece. In 1821, Mrs. Jumel had returned to her home and promptly took steps to reduce her establishment to a conformity with the reduction of her husband's circumstances.

On 24 April, 1821, at an auction sale at the house she disposed of the more expensive and elaborate of the household collection of paintings and furniture, realizing a certain amount of capital which enabled her to live quietly until the return of her husband in 1828.

Aided by his energetic wife in reorganizing his business, Jumel's circumstances became considerably augmented and he and his wife were enabled to resume much of their previous style of existence. In 1832 a fatal carriage accident deprived Mrs. Jumel of her amiable husband, and she was left to manage the affairs

of the estate, which she had considerably augmented by the acquisition of other parts of the Parkinson property.

A year later, having revived an old acquaintance with Aaron Burr, in connection with some of her investments, she was persuaded to marry that remarkable character. The impromptu ceremony took place in the mansion before the great fireplace in the tea-room, on July 3d, 1833, when she was 56 years of age and the widower approaching four-score.

The ill-assorted match soon ended in separation and for only a few weeks was Burr domiciled in the house in which more than half a century before he had, with other young patriots, and alas, with the one-time friend whom his bullet killed in 1804, received the orders of their great commander.

Burr died in September 1836, just after a suit for judicial separation instituted by Mrs. Burr had reached a successful conclusion; and after that event she resumed the use of the name Jumel.

In 1852 Mrs. Burr again visited Paris, but from that time on to her death in July 16, 1865, she lived quietly at the old house, only leaving its roof to visit Saratoga each summer, which she did for some years in old-fashioned style, driving there in an elaborate equipage.

After her death a prolonged litigation arose over the terms of her will, eventually raising the question of her own title to the property, and resulting in a compromise with the members of the Jumel family in France, finally leading to the sale of the estate in partition.

VI.

EARLECLIFF, 1903. AND ITS OWNERS SINCE 1691

An epitome of the history of the property up to this time is contained in the following record of land transfers, here published for the first time :

- 1691. Lots No. 16 and 18, drawn by Holmes & Waldron.
- 1694. Or before. Holmes & Waldron to Thomas Teurneur.
- 1694. 2 July. Teurneur to Jan Kiersen.
- 1700. 7 March. Freeholders of Harlem to Jan Kiersen—confirmation.
- 1756. John Kiersen, son of above, to Roger Morris.
- 1758. Roger Morris on marriage settlement to Mary Philipse Morris.
- 1776. Seized as headquarters for American army.
- 1776-83. Used as headquarters for British army of occupation.
- 1779. Act of Attainder.
- 1783. Sold by Commissioners of Forfeiture.
- 1784. Residence of Dr. Isaac Ledyard.
- 1785. Talmadge Hall.
- 1794. Proceedings by Mrs. Morris to recover from U. S. Government.
- 1799. William Kenyon, merchant, conveys to Leonard Parkinson.
- 1809. Morris claim sold to J. J. Astor.

1810. 28 April. L. Parkinson conveys to Stephen Jumel.
1815. Deed of settlement by Jumel and Eliza Brown Jumel to B. Desobry as trustee for Eliza B. Jumel.
1825. Stephen Jumel relinquishes his own interest.
1828. Jan. 1. Trustee conveys the property at direction of Eliza B. Jumel to Mary Jumel Bownes.
1828. May 13. Mary J. Bownes to trustee for use of Eliza B. Jumel.
1828. Nov. 1, Deed poll by Eliza B. Jumel to trustee for benefit of her husband or niece.
1865. Eliza Brown Jumel dies, will leaves property away from heirs.
1866. Judgment setting aside the will.
1865. Heirs convey to Nelson Chase, who had married Mary J. Bownes.
- 1867 to 1874. Nelson Chase successfully defends suits brought by George W. Bowen claiming heir-ship.
1878. Jumel family sue for share of the estate.
1880. Claim compromised and deed given by F. H. Jumel, Louise Plante and others of 1-6th of estate to William Inglis Chase, son of Nelson and Mary J. Chase.
1880. Quit claim by William I. Chase to the same parties.
1880. Partition suit between Chase and Jumel families.
1881. Partition ordered.
1882. Nov. 14. Property sold in partition.
Mansion purchased by William I. Chase.

The fine old house and its immediate grounds, after passing through several hands, finally came into the pos-

session of Lillie J. Earle, wife of General Ferdinand Pinney Earle, on May 17, 1894, and was named by them "Earle Cliff." General Earle, on his maternal side, was connected with the family of William Morris, a relative of the original builder of the mansion, and his possession was thus peculiarly appropriate. But still more fortunately, he and his wife were people of taste and patriotic instincts. Both were lineal descendants of those who fought to secure American Independence, and in the Civil War the General had done his share to preserve the unity of the nation which his ancestors had helped to establish. They had a keen appreciation of the historical significance of the old Colonial and Revolutionary mansion, and preserved and cherished it as a precious heirloom, hoping for the day when the city would take it under its care and maintain it as a public monument to the memory of the great name of Washington. General Earle died in the mansion Jan. 2d, 1903, without seeing their mutual desire in this respect fulfilled, but it is hoped that ere long the city will secure the Mansion from Mrs. Earle, and that thus, in the midst of a beautiful park, will happily end the vicissitudes of war and confiscation, of wealth and poverty, of romance and legal tangles, of the old mansion which will hereafter be known only as

WASHINGTON'S HEADQUARTERS.





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