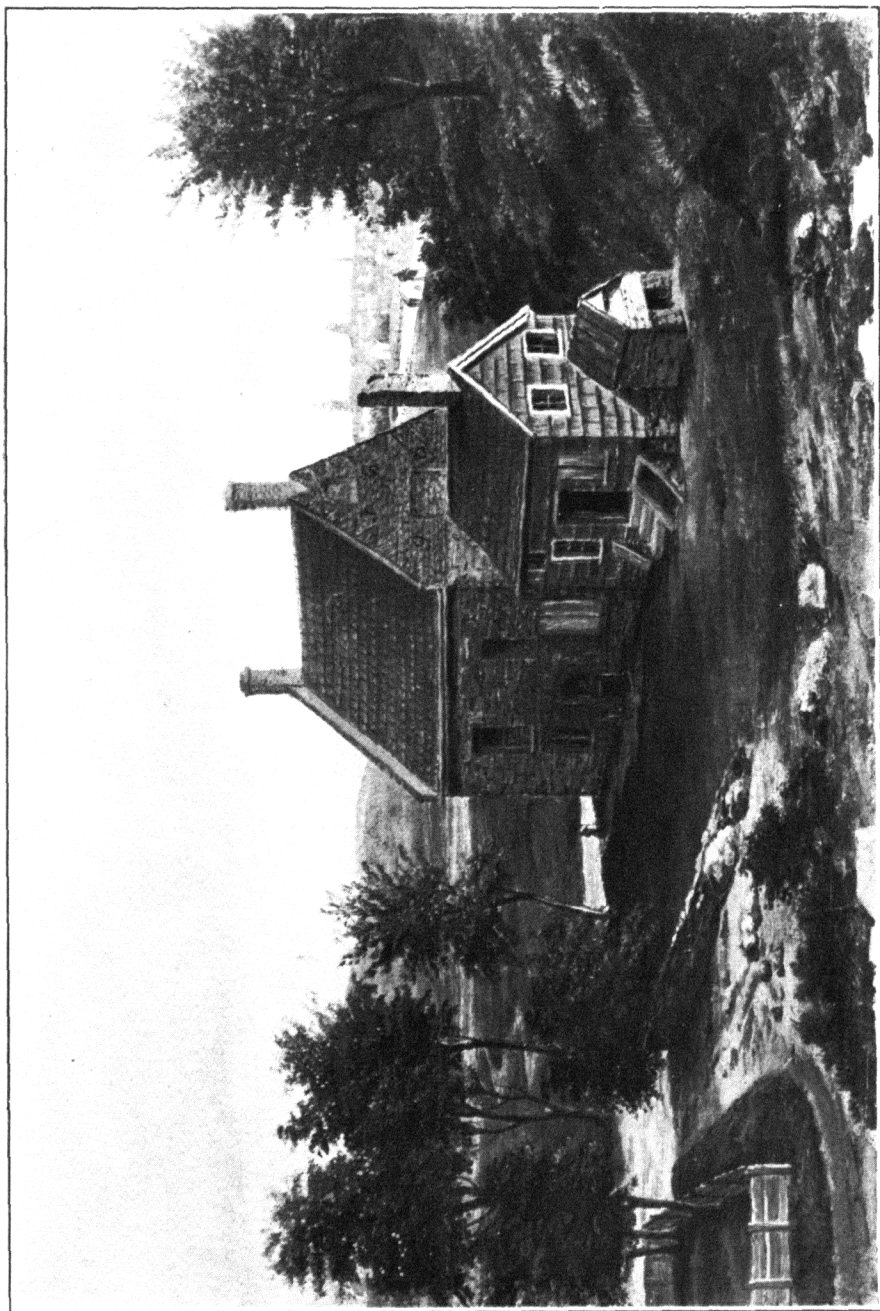


THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS



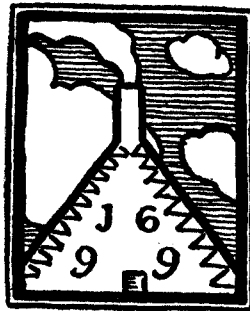
THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS, ON THE RATTLEFIELD OF LONG ISLAND.
FROM THE OIL PAINTING BY LOUIS GRUBE, 1846.

"IT IS PROVIDING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS WHAT WE GREATLY WISH HAD BEEN PROVIDED FOR US, FOR THERE ARE MANY NOW AMONG US WHO WOULD LOOK UPON A CRUDE SKETCH OF A CENTURY AGO; OR INDEED ANY PICTURE OF LOCALITIES NOW OBLITERATED, RATHER THAN UPON THE FINEST GEM OF MODERN ART."—*Valentine*.

The STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

*Scene of the Battle of Long Island. Stirling's
Headquarters, Cornwallis's Redoubt, Occupied
by Washington. Colonial Residence of Dutch
Architecture. Built by Nicholas Vechte, 1699*

By GEORGIA FRASER



WITTER *and* KINTNER
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“CONSTANTLY PURSUING THAT ARRANT THIEF,
OBLIVION, AS HE STEALS INTO INFINITE DARKNESS
WITH THE PRICELESS HISTORIES OF OUR LAND, THE
ANTIQUARY HASTENS TO SNATCH SOME OF THE
FLEETING MEMORIALS FROM HIS HANDS”—FIELD.

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TO MY NEPHEW
ALEXANDER EASTON FRASER

P R E F A T O R Y N O T E

DURING a recent sojourn at my old home in Rhode Island, I renewed acquaintance with a painting which had been familiar to me on the walls of my uncle's home during my childhood.

My uncle, Thomas Easton, was of that family of Eastons from which Easton's Beach, at Newport, was named, and to which belonged Nicholas Easton, twice president of Rhode Island under the Parliamentary Patent of 1643—his second term immediately preceding that of Roger Williams—and governor under the Royal Charter; also John Easton, governor under the same charter from 1690 to 1695.

The picture had been in my uncle's possession forty-one years, and he had received it from his uncle, George Andrews, of Brooklyn, in whose possession it had been twenty-one years, and to whose order it was painted.

When I returned to New York, I set about an investigation of the scene represented—that of a steeply-gabled house with the figures, 1699, attached to one end. The house is situ-

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

ated at the foot of some rising, wooded land to the right of the foreground; to the left is a lane, with enclosing wall and fence, leading to a road which passes the farther side of the house. Beyond the road there stretches meadows with a stream or ditch running to a creek. Still farther, to the right, is a road with clustered trees and two houses. In the extreme distance is a town or city.

In a general way I had learned of the locality represented from the title—"The Washington House on Long Island." This, however, called up merely vague memories of the great general's campaign. In order to inform myself more particularly, I began a search which took me to libraries, both public and private, to historical museums, to genealogical societies, to calls on "old residents," and to collectors of Americana.

Interest that I had thought to satisfy with a visit or two to a local library and a trip to the site of the scene depicted, carried me farther and farther, and deeper and deeper, into geographical and historical lore. I became a peruser of old documents in faded handwriting, of records of towns, churches, and colleges. The historians did not satisfy me, so I went to the historians' sources, and in

P R E F A T O R Y N O T E

so doing became possessed of that fever for research, that delight in a "find," which probably only the historian and the explorer know.

With but a single scene as my theme, a single locality, I naturally concentrated where others had diffused, and was thus enabled to compare and weigh certain points to the more definite interpretation of them. Also, while the painting soon became secondary to my historic search, its presentment of a scene since vanished, and never elsewhere pictured fully, gave clues inaccessible to others. In short, by the light of this limned presentment, facts of history were brightened, and others added: these reach from the present day back to the Revolution, back to the Dutch Patents, back to the Royal grant of the Indian island of Matowack—Long Island—to the Earl of Stirling, under whom it became the Isle of Stirling; back to Hugh de Fraser from whom my own grandfather, Hugh Fraser, was directly descended—Lord of Lovat and Kynnell, and who, as the historian, William Fraser, states, and as is also shown in the "Register of Royal Letters," was cousin and patron to Peter de Stirling away back in 1410.

Of Long Island and the Stirlings there is much to tell, but in this history I have selected

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

only that which bears directly upon the story of the Stone House, also known as the Washington House, at Gowanus, and the region about it—the scene of the Battle of Long Island in the Revolutionary War.

The many authorities consulted have given vivid accounts of the different episodes of this battle, but, as one of their number states, it is difficult to gain from these a clear understanding of the entire action. This, in a simple way, I have endeavored to do, at the same time that I have dwelt at length upon the engagement of General Stirling with the British at the Stone House, and over the area depicted in the frontispiece to this volume. In this I have been much assisted, as previously stated, by the new light thrown upon the topography of the region by the picture itself.

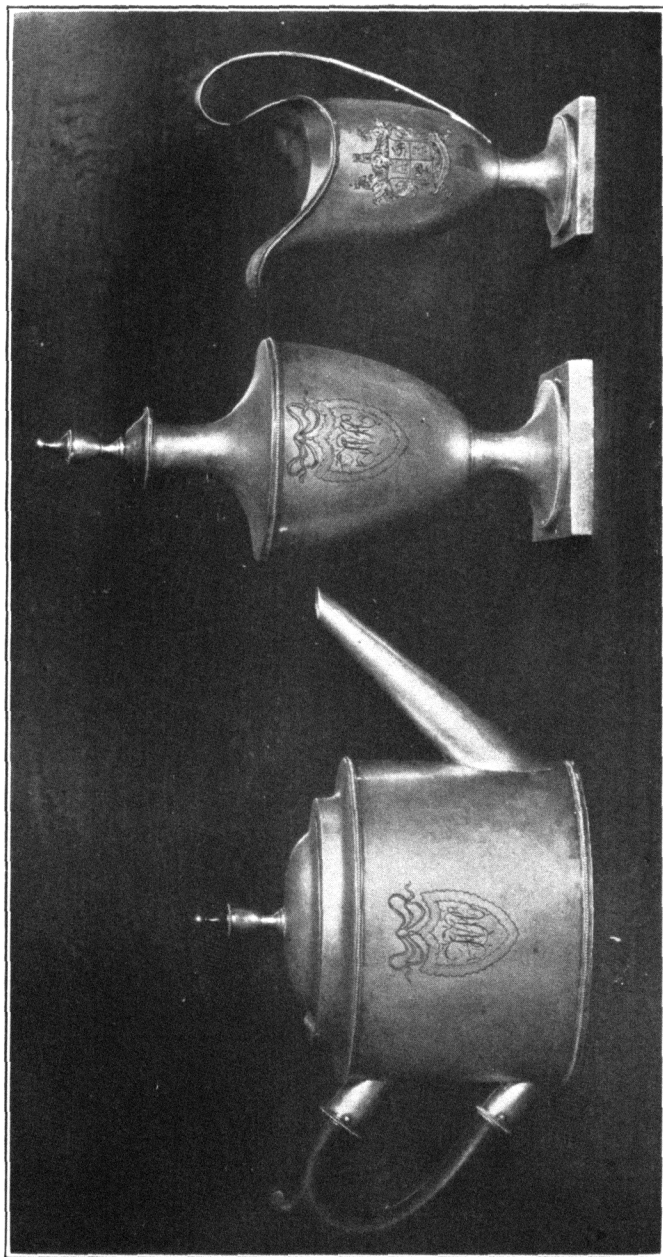
Personal search, extending over a year in time, resulted in information regarding the last days of the house and the region of the battlefield which has never heretofore been presented in print. Of my indebtedness, however, to the "Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society," to Henry M. Stiles's "History of Brooklyn," to John Fiske's "American Revolution," and to those early historians, like Furman, and later, Thompson, it would be

P R E F A T O R Y N O T E

impossible adequately to speak. To the many tracts of Colonial history, of original manuscripts, and historical prints, in the Lenox Library, I am particularly indebted.

GEORGIA FRASER.

New York, September 1, 1909.



COLONIAL SILVER USED BY THE FAMILY OF JAKUES CORTEYOU WHILE IN THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS, NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF HIS GRAND-DAUGHTER, MRS. MERWIN RUSHMORE.



COPPER TEA KETTLE WITH CHARCOAL BURNER, USED BY THE FAMILY OF JAKES CORTELYOU WHILE IN THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS. NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER, MRS. MERWIN RUSHMORE.



COLONIAL DRESSING TABLE OF MAHOGANY USED BY THE FAMILY OF JAKES CORTEYOU WHILE IN THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS. NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER, MRS. MERWIN RUSHMORE.

FIRST SETTLEMENT AT GOWANUS

THE first settlement by white people within the boundaries of the present city of Brooklyn was made in 1636, just twenty-seven years after Henry Hudson dropped anchor from the *Halve Maen* in what is now New York Bay.

In the year 1636, "William Bennet and Jacques Bentyen purchased from the Indians a tract of 930 acres of land at Gowanus, upon which, at some time previous to the Indian War of 1643-45, a dwelling house was erected." This was the beginning of the village of Gowanus, near Gowanus Bay; and the same name was given to the region bordering Gowanus Creek, afterward the canal, and extending easterly to the wooded hills.

The name, Gowanus, is an Indian one, and was said to be the place where an Indian, called Gowane, planted his corn.

The second settlement within the present city limits took place in the year following that at Gowanus—1637—and, oddly enough,

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

in a section similar in character, a low tract bordered by hills and pierced by bay and inlet, and lying to the north, as Gowanus lay to the south, of the peninsula of Brooklyn Heights. This northern tract was known as the Wallabout—originally Wahleboct—the name being given to the bay and adjacent lands as in the case of Gowanus. The settlers at the Wallabout were known as Walloons, or foreigners, comprising, as they did, those who, while coming directly from Holland, were not of Dutch blood, but mostly political or religious refugees to that land of toleration from France, England, Germany, and other countries.

The first settler at the Wallabout, and the second within the present limits of Brooklyn, was Joris Jansen de Rapelie, or Rapelje, himself a "foreigner" of French descent. He is described as an "emigrant" of 1623, who first settled at Fort Orange (Albany), and in 1626 removed to New Amsterdam, on Manhattan Island. According to this, Rapelie arrived in the New World but fourteen years after Henry Hudson reached its shores, and lived in New York eleven years before removing to Long Island.

At this time there was decided demarca-

FIRST SETTLEMENT AT GOWANUS

tion between those of pure Dutch strain and those who came with the Dutch in the same ships but who were not of the same blood. This is shown by the segregation, for a considerable period, of the Walloons—not only at the Wallabout but down through Gowanus, where were already the settlers previously named, William Bennet and Jacques Bentyne, the first English, the second French, in origin.

We may credit, then, the first settlement of Brooklyn to “foreign blood” though to Dutch enterprise. The later incoming of pure Dutch to this region, and the subsequent forming of villages, led to an amalgamation which, going steadily on for a century and more, was practically complete at the time of the Revolutionary War. In this particular it must be remembered that Dutch records gave Dutch spelling to much that was not entitled to it, and rigorous search would probably bring to light the fact that many so-called early Dutch were not Dutch at all in origin.

The first point known as Brooklyn, named after Breuckelen in Holland, was on a direct line between the Wallabout and Gowanus. This was on the declivity southeast of the present City Hall, about where Hoyt Street joins

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

Fulton Street to-day. It will be seen that these earliest settlers sought the low lands, not only, probably, because the heights meant exposure to the Indians, but because the hills were wooded and would have to be cleared. Also, the broad meadow lands must have appealed to these people so late from Holland's green stretches.

During the first half-century, progression was made from thatched huts and stockades to timber, brick and, in a few cases, stone dwellings. The last, however, were so scarce as to have been particularly designated as such in the localities thus favored. As to minor necessities, ships from Europe added blue china, some silver, and a great deal of pewter to the tableware originally brought by the settlers. Houses were amply supplied with linen, and some cotton was raised and spun by the women. It is curious to note that foreign countries were supplying the American colonists with goods of similar character to that which, respectively, they furnish to-day. In the cargo of the sloop *Mary*, wrecked on the eastern point of Long Island in 1702, and having aboard goods from the French settlements in Canada for the Dutch of New Amsterdam, there is found—besides wines,

FIRST SETTLEMENT AT GOWANUS

brandies, and furs—goods listed by the mate as follows:

“1 bolt of Holland Duck. 1 piece of Broad Canvas. 18 pieces and 2 remnants of several sorts of stuff. 7 pieces of colored dimity. 8 pieces of striped Kentings. 4 Remnants of Alligars. 3 remnants of Dyed Calico. 4 Printed Calico Carpets. 2 Bundles of Beads. 9 Pieces of Printed Lining or Calico, and a remnant of Light Colored Cloth 14 yards. 2 pieces of stuff and 2 remnants. 1 Piece of Light Colored Flannel.”

If this was a sample of the cargoes of “goods” brought to the colonists of the period, together with what was spun and woven by themselves, we can imagine that the four-posters were well valanced, and the belles of the day well “done up” in the figured muslins referred to as calico.

Home-made rugs and mirrors were in the “best rooms” of ordinary homes, and there were also some books and pictures, the first mainly Bibles and Psalms. According to Valentine, “the walls of the principal rooms in all classes of dwellings were adorned by engravings, colored and plain, fifteen to twenty in number, in narrow black frames.”

The extensive trade with the East Indies,

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

and the East generally, by Holland at this period, brought much of the Orient to the Dutch settlements in America. In prominent households, teakwood furniture, delicate China, and rare Eastern silks were added to the mahogany, pewter, and silver of those of more moderate standing. Men and women of the wealthiest class dressed elegantly—the men in broadcloth, with satin and linen accessories; and the women in silks, linens and velvets. Gold and silver ornaments were plentiful, and diamonds were not unknown. According to Stiles, many persons of ample means came out from Holland, and these had homes and apparel equal in many cases to what they had been accustomed in the Old world. Each prominent settler possessed at least two slaves, valued at from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty dollars each.

In the year 1660, there were thirty-one families in the entire region of the Wallabout, Breuckelen, and Gowanus; and the church at Breuckelen, which presided over this united section, numbered twenty-seven members. These, however, increased rapidly thereafter.

Of this section of Western Long Island, a most intimate account is given in the "Journal

FIRST SETTLEMENT AT GOWANUS

of a Voyage to New York in 1679-80," by Jasper Dankers and Peter Sluyter, emissaries from a religious sect called Labadists, who visited America with the object of selecting a suitable home for the sect. They write how, crossing the ferry from Manhattan to Long Island, they continued "up the hill, along open roads, and a little wood, through the first village, called Breuckelen, which has a small and ugly church standing in the middle of the road." This was the first church building in Brooklyn, built in 1666.

They turned to the right after leaving Breuckelen, arriving at Gowanus, where they were well entertained with whatever their hosts happened to have on hand, milk, cider, and fruit being particularly mentioned. They speak of the peach trees, "all laden with fruit to breaking down." And continuing, "We came to a place surrounded with such trees from which so many had fallen off that the ground could not be discerned, and you could not put your foot down without trampling them; and notwithstanding such large quantities had fallen off, the trees still were as full as they could bear."

They visited the house of Simon de Hart, a French Walloon, who lived in Gowanus on a

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

part of the original Bennet and Bentyn purchase. The house stood at what is now Twenty-eighth Street. Here they found great hospitality, together with a wood-fire of oak and hickory. After describing this fire, they continue: "There had been already thrown upon it, to be roasted, a pailfull of *Gouanes* oysters, which are the best in the country. . . . They are large and full, some of them not less than a foot long, and they grow sometimes ten, twelve, and sixteen together, and are then like a piece of rock. Others are young and small. . . . They pickle the oysters in small casks, and send them to Barbadoes and the other islands. We had for supper a roasted haunch of venison, which he (De Hart) had bought of the Indians . . . and which weighed twenty pounds. The meat was exceedingly tender and good, and also quite fat. . . . We were also served with wild turkey and a wild goose. . . . We saw here, lying in a heap, a whole hill of watermelons, which were as large as pumpkins."

Later they write of Gowanus:

"There is, toward the sea, a large piece of low, flat land which is overflown at every tide, like the *schorr* (marsh) with us, miry and muddy at the bottom, and which produces

FIRST SETTLEMENT AT GOWANUS

a species of hard salt grass, or reed grass. Such a place they call valey, and mow it for hay, which cattle would rather eat than fresh hay or grass. . . . There is also a tract which is somewhat large, of a kind of heath, on which sheep could graze. . . . This meadow, like all others, is well provided with creeks, which are navigable and very serviceable for fisheries. There is here a grist mill driven by the water which they dam up in the creek; and it is hereabouts they go mostly to shoot snipe and wild geese. In the middle of this meadow there is a grove into which we went, and within which there was a good vale cleared off and planted."

The meadow here described was that directly at the Stone House of this history—not erected till twenty years later—as the oldest mill in Gowanus was at the historic mill-ponds just beyond, in the frontispiece hidden by the house itself. The heath where "sheep could graze," the "grove," and the "dam in the creek," proclaim that the area described was the region of the Vechte farm, the subject of the succeeding chapter.

The inhabitants of Gowanus, having the advantage of the creek, went to New York by their own boats, rather than overland and to

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

the ferry. When back in New York, the travelers speak of arriving at their house and finding "Simon of *Gouanes* who had brought a load of wood."

They went thereafter many times to *Gouanes*, and other points on Long Island. They were particular friends of Gerritt, Simon de Hart's brother-in-law, who took them in his boat on many of their trips around New York Bay. Later, while in Maryland, they referred again to Gowanus oysters: "After supper we eat some Maryland oysters which he—their host—had brought up with him. We found them good, but *Gowanus* oysters at New York are better."

Of the bay at the Wallabout, which they visited, and where they conversed with Carolyn, wife of the settler Joris Jansen Rapelje—herself a French Walloon—they write:

"This is a bay tolerably wide where the water rises and falls much, and at low tide is very shallow."

STARTING with the first farms of Gowanus and the Wallabout, land was taken rapidly along the entire stretch connecting the two points. These farms began at the creeks or bays, and stretched up through the meadows to the wooded hills, at the borders of which the homesteads were built. As time advanced, the evacuation of the nearby woods by the Indians, and the pressure for more land by the colonists, led to the accession of the wooded patch in line with each previous boundary, so that later patents in this vicinity included clear rights from the waters of bay or creek to the crest of the backing hills. At the present day at Gowanus, this would mean from the canal to the heights of Greenwood or Prospect Park, including in the last-named what is now Park Slope. In this manner each farm had its waterway, its meadow, its garden at the wood's edge, and its timber.

One of the above-described favored stretches began at what is now the Gowanus Canal be-

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

tween First and Sixth Streets, stretched back to the present Fifth Avenue, over what is practically level ground, then began the steep ascent of the present Park Slope—traversed transversely by Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Avenues—to Prospect Park, at the point now crowned by the Litchfield Mansion, to-day park property.

This area, indicated in the accompanying diagram, was known during the latter part of the Seventeenth Century as the Vechte farm; and in the year 1699 Nicholas Vechte erected at the edge of his wooded slope the Stone House of this history.

How long Nicholas Vechte owned the farm previous to the erection of the house, or whether any simpler edifice preceded it, is a matter merely for conjecture. What is known is this: It was the only stone house in Gowanus at the time of its erection, and for a long time thereafter; it was built so staunchly as to withstand siege in one of the hottest engagements of the Revolutionary War, its walls being several feet thick; and it remained in existence till the last decade of the Nineteenth Century, even then Gatling guns being necessary, it is said, to force apart the stones of its walls.

THE STONE HOUSE IN 1699

And not only staunchly but finely was it built, a splendid mansion for its day and place—two stories and a half in height, the gable adorned with brass figures of the date of erection, 1699. Most dwellings of this period were but a story and a half in height, with a door and two windows on the main side. The fact that the Stone House at Gowanus was of sufficient length to have a door in the middle with windows on either side, as well as its unusual height, probably gave it the appellation, used by historian Thompson and others, of “double house.”

The time of the building of the Stone House was one rife with momentous affairs of state in the New York Colonies; in the year 1691 the first permanent “Assembly of representatives of the people” was established—the first real step in freedom of government for these colonies. Trouble with the Indians had then well abated, and piracy—with which the American and West Indian coasts had been affected—came to an end about this time. In fact, it was in the same year as the building of the Stone House at Gowanus, 1699, that the famous Captain Kidd—who had been sent three years previously from England to suppress piracy, and who had himself become the

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

worst pirate of all—landed near Easthampton, Long Island, and there buried some of his often referred to treasure. Incidentally, it may be stated that the treasure there buried was recovered.

Back of the Stone House ascended the wooded hill; trees edged the roadway, a stone wall and a fence enclosed the garden, and the meadow stretched before to the creek. To the left could be seen the waters of Gowanus Bay, widening to the distant Bay of New York. Across the creek, the land rose to hills, extending northeasterly as far as the eye could see, grassy and in places tree-topped—the peninsula of Brooklyn Heights.

Before the house, across the road, there bubbled a spring of clear water. This spring, no doubt, determined the location of the homestead. It was the source of a stream which found its way across the meadow to the creek.

Written originally, Claes Arentse Van Vechten, or by himself Klaes Arents Vecht, Nicholas Vechte “with his wife Lammetie, three children, and a boy (colored slave) emigrated from Norch, or Nora, a community in the province of Drenthe, Holland, in the ship Bonticoe (Spotted Cow), arrived in New Netherlands, in April, 1660, settled, as near as



THE CORTELYOU MANSION HOUSE.

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS, AS PICTURED IN THE VALENTINE MANUAL OF 1858. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE LENOX LIBRARY.



THE VECHTE-CORTELYOU HOUSE, AT GOWANUS

(Fulton Avenue near Fourth Street)

Frontispiece.

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS — FRONTISPIECE TO THE "HISTORY OF BROOKLYN," BY HENRY R. STILES. REPRODUCED BY PERMISSION OF THE LENOX LIBRARY.

THE STONE HOUSE IN 1699

can be ascertained, in the Eighth ward of Brooklyn, on the farm extending from First to Fifth Streets, and erected in 1699 the old stone house known as the Vechte mansion."

The above is taken from the history of the Bergen family (which intermarried with the Vechtes) by Teunis G. Bergen, who goes on to say:

"It is possible that he—Claes or Nicholas Vechte—may have resided at one period on Staten Island, for he obtained, September 29, 1677, from Governor Andros, a patent for 120 acres of upland and 12 acres of meadow along the Kil Von Kull on said island, which premises he conveyed January 17, 1689, to his son, Gerrett Claesen, as per record of deeds in office of secretary of state, New York."

Regarding the above, it is practically certain that the builder of the Stone House at Gowanus lived for a considerable period at Staten Island on this same patent on the Kil Von Kull, after his arrival in the New World; as this would adequately explain the fact that he and his son Hendrich had been twenty-seven years in the New World at the time of their signing the oath of allegiance to the new governor, Dongan, on Long Island in 1687, although no mention had been previously

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

made of either father or son in this region. So influential a family would undoubtedly have been noted in Long Island annals had they resided there; so it is probable that the date, 1687, very nearly coincides with the removal of the family from Staten Island and the Kil Von Kull to western Long Island—two regions not at all dissimilar in character. Also, it was close to this period, in 1689, that Claes conveyed the Staten Island property to his son, Gerritt, as previously noted.

Gerritje, the daughter of the Staten Island Gerritt, and consequently granddaughter of Nicholas (or Claes) Vechte, married Frederick Jacobsen Bergen. About the same time, another of the Bergens married the daughter of Simon De Hart at Gowanus, that De Hart whom the Labadist travelers so frequently visited, and whose house is described in the first chapter of this book. Owing to this marriage, the De Hart House became subsequently the Bergen House, long famous in history. Also, by these marriages, became linked the De Hart and Vechte families, whose homesteads at Gowanus—the former at the cove, the latter at the creek—remained till modern times as the two oldest houses of the region about.

THE STONE HOUSE IN 1699

Owing to the varying spelling of names at this period, confusion of personality is frequent. For instance, not only was the family name of the builder of the Stone House constantly varied, but the first as well; also, the middle name was frequently used as the final one. Thus, Gerritt, son of Claes Vechte, was referred to, even in legal documents, as Gerritt Claessen, when his entire name was Gerritt Claesen Vechte, or Van Vechten. Also, in legal matters the wife used her maiden name only, as indeed she did in many others. Consequently, as a widow, Gerritje Bergen would sign herself as Gerritje Vechte; also, sometimes as Gerritje Claessen, from her father's middle name. Tracing relationship thus becomes something of a puzzle to students of the time; and were the names as set down to be alone relied upon, the search might prove, in certain cases, almost futile.

Hendrich Vechte, also written Hendrich Claessen Vechte, went with his father to Long Island. In 1690, he was elected a commissioner of Brooklyn, and was "re-elected each successive year until 1699." It is possible that his failure of re-election in this year—the date of the completion of the Stone House—was

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

due to the family's removal from Brooklyn to Gowanus, then two distinct communities.

As time goes on, however, the name appears in Long Island records. In 1701, Hendrich is named as a justice of the peace. About this time Sarah Van Vechten married Teunis Rapelje, grandson of that Joris Jansen Rapelje, who first settled the Wallabout, and whose daughter was proclaimed the first white child born on American soil north of Virginia. The grandmother of this Teunis, and wife of the settler Joris Jansen Rapelje, was the famous Catelyna Trico, who talked with the Labadist travelers, and who, like the vivacious Parisian she was before her arrival in the New World, left to posterity the oft-quoted account of her experiences in the ship *New Netherland*, reaching these shores in March, 1623, with "thirty Walloon families"; as well as her subsequent journeying to Albany, then Fort Orange, the return to New Amsterdam, and the final settling on Long Island. She was long the social arbiter of this section, and her grandson's marriage to Sarah Van Vechten probably brought her frequently to the Stone House at Gowanus.

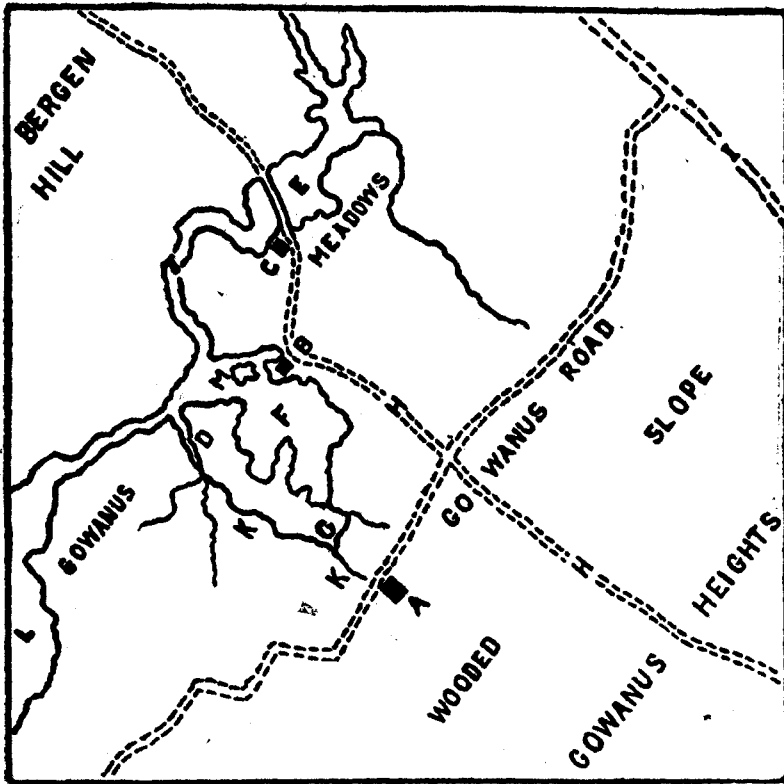
The church in Brueckelen, described by the Labadists, which presided as well over the

THE STONE HOUSE IN 1699

spiritual welfare of Gowanus and the Wallabout, and which the Vechtes attended together with the Rapeljes, the Brouers, and others of now well-known names of the neighborhood, was the scene of as lively controversies as often stir the peace of present-day religious organizations. In a quarrel between factions of the church as to whether the minister, a Mr. Freeman, should be allowed to preach on a certain Sunday, it is stated by Furman, in his "Notes Relating to the Town of Brooklyn on Long Island," that "Hendrich Vechte, Esq., a justice of the peace, was presented at the King's county sessions, May the 14th, 1710, for coming into the Brooklyn Church on Sunday, August 10, 1709, with his pen and ink in his hand, taking of people's names, and taking up one particular man's hatt, and in disturbance of the minister and people in the service of God."

In commenting on this, Historian Thompson writes:

"Vechte's plea was that in obedience to an order of the Governor, he did go into the church as alleged, to take notice of the persons that were guilty of the forcible entry made into the church, that by Abram Brower, and others, by breaking of said Church door with



- A Stone House of Gowanus, owned by the Vechtes in 1699 and 1776.*
- B The Lower Mill, built by Abram Brower in 1701. Owned by Nehemiah Denton during the Revolutionary War, and then called Denton's Mill.*
- C The Upper or Gowanus Mill—Oldest Mill in Brooklyn, called Freeke's Mill during the Revolutionary War.*
- D Branch of Gowanus Creek extending into Vechte Farm. At the present day an arm of Gowanus Canal.*
- E Upper, or Freeke's Mill-Pond.*
- F Lower Mill-Pond. Called Denton's Mill-Pond during the War.*
- G Private canal of Nicholas Vechte, connecting Brower's Pond with his own creek.*
- H Porte Road, running from Gowanus Heights across mill-ponds.*
- I Flatbush Road, running from Flatbush, over Wooded Heights, to Brooklyn.*
- J Gowanus Creek, now the Gowanus Canal.*
- K Brook on the Vechte Farm, rising from spring beside the Stone House and emptying into arm of the Gowanus Creek.*
- L Gowanus Creek widening to Gowanus Bay.*
- M Island where many soldiers were buried.*

THE STONE HOUSE IN 1699

force and arms, forcibly entering into said Church, notwithstanding the forewarning of Mr. Freeman, the minister, and his people to the contrary."

The court discharged Vechte, declaring that he acted but in the performance of his duty as laid down by the Governor. But it is to be noted that Mr. Hendrich Vechte was a member of the court which discharged him.

This particular quarrel in the church was the occasion of disputes leading almost to fisti-cuffs, and, as one complainant has it, "all over these Dutch ministers."

In the "History of Kings County" by Henry R. Stiles, there is set forth an incident which at once brings the humanness of Nicholas Vechte close to the readers of the Twentieth Century, and brings close also the two old neighbors, Vechte and Abram Brouer. The narrative runs:

"Denton's pond (so-called by the historian because of its ownership by Nehemiah Denton at the time of the Revolution) was the subject of a curious contract about 1709 between its original proprietors, Abram and Nicholas Brouer, and Nicholas Vechte, the builder and occupant of the old 1699, or Cortelyou, house. To the strong predilection of his race for

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canals and dikes and water communications, old Vechte added the traits of eccentricity and independence. His house stood on a bank a few feet above the salt meadows, at a distance of a hundred yards from the navigable waters of the creek. To secure access to them, from his kitchen door, Vechte dug a narrow canal to the creek, but the ebb-tide often left his boat firmly sunk in the mud when he wished to reach the city market with the produce of his farm. He, therefore, contracted with the Brouers to supply him with water from their pond; and a channel was dug, in furtherance of his scheme, to a water-gate, through which his canal was to be flooded. The old Dutch farmer was accustomed to seat himself in his loaded boat, while it was resting in the mud of the empty channel, and hoist his paddle as a signal to his negro servant to raise the gate. The flood soon floated his boat, and bore him out to the creek, exulting with great glee over his neighbors whose stranded boats must await the next flood. The contract for this privilege, as well as another, by which Vechte leased the right to plant the ponds with oysters," are still in existence. (Notes.)

From the early part of the Eighteenth Century, little mention is made in histories of the

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locality of either the Van Vechten family or its neighbors; due to the fact that records were lost with the occupation of the British during the Revolution. Of such as remained, it is stated that in 1751, Nicholas Vechte of Gowanus, grandson of the first Nicholas, is facilitating approach to his property from the sea. The narrative runs:

"In August, 1751, Isaac Sebring, in consideration of 117 pounds, conveyed to Nicholas Vechte, Jerry Brouer, and others, all Gowanus residents, the fee of a strip of meadow, beginning at the east side of a little island where John Van Dyke's mill-dam is bounded upon, running from thence northerly into the river, and twelve feet and a half wide." He was also to make a ditch along this strip, according to Stiles in his "History of the City of Brooklyn," at least six feet deep, "and to allow the grantees the use of a footpath, two feet and a half wide, to dragg, or haul up their canoes or boats. March 16, 1774, the Colonial Assembly of the state passed an act empowering the people of Gowanus to widen the canal, keep it in order, and tax those who used it."

The canal was a short cut by water to New York for Gowanus residents. It ran from the creek to what is now Atlantic Basin, and was

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used up to modern times. From first to last, the love of canals, as well as the name Nicholas remained in the family, Nicholas Vechte, great-grandson of the builder of the Stone House, still owning the property at the time of the Revolutionary War.

A facsimile of a handwritten signature in cursive script. The signature reads "Ja: Cortelyou. 1657". The letters are dark and fluid, with a long, sweeping tail on the final "u".

FACSIMILE OF THE SIGNATURE OF JAQUES
CORTELYOU, FROM THE "HISTORY OF THE
BERGEN FAMILY," BY TEUNIS BERGEN.

CHAPTER THREE LORD STIRLING

MILITARY WORKS ON LONG ISLAND

BROOKLYN, by the year 1776, was possessed of some four thousand inhabitants. Writers have referred to it at that time as a prosperous agricultural community. It had undergone difficulties in the way of titles to lands under alternating Dutch and English rules, and had come through some serious affairs with the Indians; hence, at this time, it was about ready to settle down to the enjoyment of comforts achieved in the new home.

These settlers were possessed of good lands; they had schools and churches; no doubt many of them considered the altercation with England but another of those upheavals of government which had at times deprived them of their land titles and made security of property uncertain. However this may be, there is no doubt that many viewed with intense concern the arrival, on the 18th of February, 1776, of four hundred troops under General Charles Lee.

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Disliking these intruders upon their peace, many adhered to this sentiment both actively and passively throughout the war. And the feeling increased with the spread of the first military operations from the peninsula of Brooklyn Heights—overlooking New York Bay on the west—to that series of easterly heights from which could be viewed the vast plain stretching to the southern shore of Long Island. Prospect Range was the name given to the eastern series of hills, whose position is very well indicated on the popular maps of Brooklyn by the green-tinted area of the Cemetery of the Evergreens, Eastern Parkway, Prospect Park, and Greenwood Cemetery. Military operations were thus brought directly into that fine belt of farms which began in the salt meadows of Gowanus and stretched back through the woods to the crest of Prospect Range. Officers were stationed in the farm houses, and the soldiers pitched tents about, while agricultural pursuits generally were given over to the activities of defense, even the women dropping their weaving to wait upon the army which had so precipitately overwhelmed western Long Island.

General Lee it was who first offered outside assistance to New York, and who

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subsequently, on February 3rd, arrived there from Connecticut with twelve thousand men. Lord Stirling, at the time, was military commandant at New York, and he had while there "performed a very gallant act," according to historian Heading: "Although the *Asia* man-of-war, a British ship, lay in the harbor, he one night fitted out a pilot boat and some smaller boats, and taking his men with nothing but muskets, put to sea and captured an English transport laden with stores, etc., for the enemy at Boston."

Less than two weeks after his arrival on Long Island, General Lee started south to Charlestown; and on March 6th Lord Stirling crossed to Long Island and took command of the projected works there. That he skilfully and assiduously pursued the task of fortification is everywhere admitted—an almost incredible amount of work having been accomplished in the following months. That it was not entirely completed is not surprising when time, and the extent of the defenses, are considered.

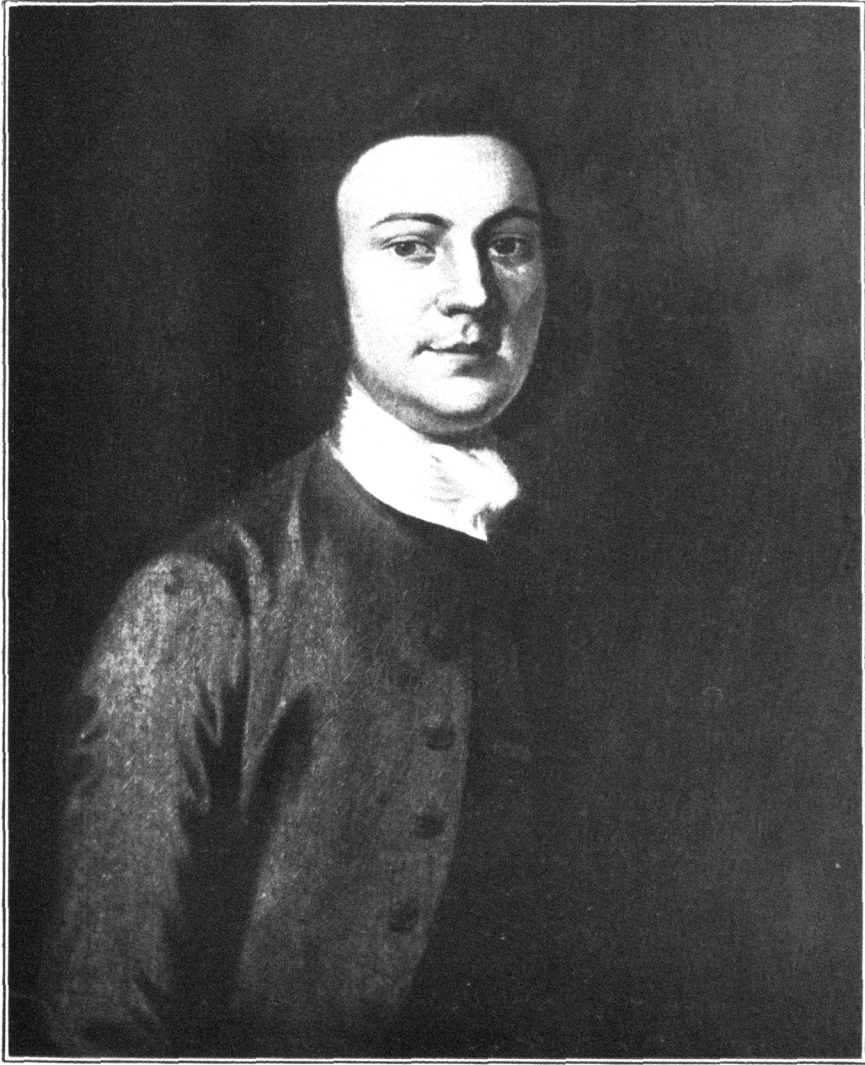
On Brooklyn Heights a chain of forts was established. These began with Fort Putnam on the north, and extended to Red Hook, the southernmost point of the peninsula. The

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first of these to be mounted with guns was Fort Stirling, situated at Coenties Slip, or at what is now Columbia, Orange and Clark Streets, which in the frontispiece to this volume would be directly back of the City Hall spire, and overlooking the East River. Intrenchments and redoubts marked the lines between the forts.

To the east, on Prospect Range, no forts as such were attempted; but earthworks, redoubts, and barricades were general, and a regular picket line extended from what is now Eastern Parkway to Greenwood. The line was especially strong at Gowanus—the nearest point in the eastern range to the lines at Brooklyn, and the most direct in approach from the southern, or ocean, shore of Long Island.

The Americans in Brooklyn had British invasion from both land and water to consider; and there was the added uncertainty as to whether New York or Brooklyn would be first attacked. For this reason, the work of fortification in both places was little less than stupendous, time considered, extending in its entirety for fifteen miles—from the heights of Gowanus on Long Island, to those of Harlem on Manhattan. In Brooklyn half the male



PORTRAIT OF LORD STIRLING, FROM THE PAINTING BY BENJAMIN WEST, IN THE POSSESSION OF DR. ROBERT WATTS.

"THE OFFICERS GIVE LORD STIRLING THE CHARACTER OF AS BRAVE A MAN AS EVER LIVED."—FIELD.

MILITARY WORKS ON LONG ISLAND

population were drafted for the work of defense, and they were obliged to furnish, beside picks, hoes, shovels, and axes, wood and brush for the barricades.

While Prospect Range was prepared for outpost or picket duty only, the tremendous importance of these heights as a natural barrier between the southern shore of the island and the lines at Brooklyn was fully appreciated by all concerned. For this reason, no doubt, General Lord Stirling, among the bravest and most resourceful of the American commanders, was here placed in charge on the 29th of June—when the British fleet, and the army under Howe, anchored off Sandy Hook.

With his arrival off the coast, Lord Howe immediately began overtures for peace. Finding, however, that the only condition which would be entertained by the colonists was absolute independence, he proceeded to land a large force at Staten Island—in all about nine thousand men. Here he was joined by a number of loyalists, particularly from Long Island.

Further negotiations with Washington were then attempted, backed by advices from England, who at that particular moment was in no mood for war with the American Colonies, having her hands full with troublesome foes

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on the Continent. But again the negotiations failing, Howe proceeded to land his entire force, and on the 22nd of August an immense British army took camp at Gravesend—stretching thence for several miles toward Jamaica Bay.

In the "Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society" there is given a vivid description of this period:

"For five days the white tents of the enemy covered the plain beneath the hills, almost as far as the eye could distinguish their form. Five miles to the south they stretched, in an unbroken line. . . . The roll of the enemy's drums, the rattle of arms and accoutrements in the daily parade, and the shout of command, rose faintly to the ear from the wide plain; and the sight and sound combined to exhibit to the sadly thin and feeble lines of the American army on the hills, what a vast armament, what gigantic forces, could in a single hour be hurled upon them."

In Brooklyn, General Greene had command within the lines. He was a most capable officer, and had made himself acquainted with all the details of arms and locality. Washington was now obliged to give particular attention to Brooklyn, although the British ships in

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command of Admiral Howe, brother of the General, lay menacingly in the bay, and might at any moment attack New York.

New York, at this time, was about its present width at Wall Street. North and south, it reached from Chatham Street to the Battery; and beyond, "Bowery Lane" ran through a bower of orchards and gardens. Fortresses were all along the water front, at the northern end of Manhattan Island, and across on the Jersey shore. Many of the streets were barricaded, and a line of redoubts ran from river to river on Canal Street.

The army was about evenly divided between Brooklyn and New York. While New York, situated on the mainland, would prove undoubtedly the ultimate place of attack, yet it had been pointed out that the Heights of Brooklyn overlooked New York as Bunker Hill and Dorchester Heights overlooked Boston.

Washington's headquarters at this moment were on Manhattan, but his time was spent about equally between New York and Brooklyn. Carefully and anxiously he visited every point of the fortifications. On the 23d of August, Howe issued a proclamation to the loyalists of Long Island, promising protection to

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

such as would relinquish American arms and join the King's forces. On the day following, Washington addressed the soldiers in Brooklyn. His address ran in part:

"The enemy have now landed on Long Island, and the hour is fast approaching in which the honor and success of this army, and the safety of our bleeding country, will depend. Remember, officers and soldiers, that you are freemen, fighting for the blessings of liberty, and slavery will be your portion, if you do not acquit yourselves like men. Remember how your courage and spirit have been despised and traduced by your cruel invaders, though they have found by dear experience at Boston, Charlestown, and other places, what a few brave men, contending in their own land, and in the best of causes can do against hirelings and mercenaries. . . . Those who are distinguished for their gallantry and good conduct may depend on being honorably noticed and suitably rewarded; and if this army will but emulate and imitate their brave countrymen in other parts of America, he (the commander) has no doubt they will, by glorious victory, save their country, and acquire to themselves immortal honor."

But while thus rallying his troops, there

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can be little doubt of Washington's anxiety. Again and again he visited the Brooklyn lines. On the 26th, General Greene, being prostrated by a fever which affected about one-quarter of the troops in Brooklyn, was superseded by General Putnam. As this officer was more or less unacquainted with the locality, the change did not add security to the situation. On the same day, Washington visited all the outposts. According to Lossing, "on the 26th, he (Washington) again visited the lines. . . . All that day he was occupied in visiting the redoubts and guard posts, and reconnoitering the enemy, until he made himself well acquainted with the relative position of the belligerent forces." It is said that what he then observed "gave him great anxiety."

The idea of certain historians that Washington never went without the lines at Brooklyn cannot be upheld, one excellent authority notwithstanding; it is not easy to believe that a commander like Washington would not have been an eye-witness to the enemy's position at this critical moment, and himself have viewed the works of defense nearest the British lines. In fact, from the Heights of Brooklyn, it would have been impossible to have viewed the British

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encampment, or to have taken cognizance of the successive moves of the enemy after landing. The real point of vantage in this respect was that occupied by the forces (large map) on the slopes of Gowanus, and here to the Stone House, the most important in the neighborhood, as early history has it, Washington must have come. Indeed, at this particular moment, it was probably only the threatening attitude of the British ships in the harbor which called Washington to Manhattan at all. On the evening of the 26th he was reported as "very anxious," and unable to sleep, feeling sure that with the morning the Republican arms would be attacked by both land and sea. Yet he finally composed himself with the now famous, oft-quoted reflection: "The same Providence that rules to-day will rule to-morrow." Thus giving himself into the hands of Divine guidance, he fell asleep, only to wake in the morning, as he had expected, to the "deep thunder of distant cannon."

AMERICAN TROOPS ON LONG ISLAND

TRROOPS from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and New England had been poured into Brooklyn. As previously suggested, many of these were raw recruits—at the same time, the “very flower of the American army” was at Gowanus with Stirling. One of Stirling’s regiments was made up of young men from the most prominent families of Maryland. According to a Hessian account, they were “very tall, fine men. The same writer declares that Stirling’s was the only American regiment on Long Island which was regularly uniformed and armed. The men wore a red and blue uniform, and carried very fine English muskets and bayonets.”

Four roads led from the south shore of Long Island to Brooklyn. Two of these were more or less natural passes in the hills, one by way of Flatbush directly through what is now Prospect Park, and the other a little north by the town of Bedford. The third made a detour toward Jamaica, skirting the

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

hills to the east at what is now the cemetery of the Evergreens; while the fourth and, strategically, the most important, turned the western foot of the hills by the bay shore, and swung around through Gowanus. This was called the Shore Road, as it followed the shore of New York Bay from the Narrows, at which point the British army and navy were in direct communication with each other. (Large map.)

Because the Shore Road was the most direct route from the British camp to the Brooklyn lines, the region of its approach was most thoroughly fortified, and placed in command of Stirling. The adjoining pass through the hills was given to General Sullivan. The extreme east was unprotected except by guard-posts. The reason for this was probably twofold: first, there were not enough troops to garrison the entire range; second, it was still uncertain at what point—whether at Manhattan or Brooklyn, whether by land or water, or both—the first move would be made, and Washington relied on Stirling to give warning of the enemy's line of action. When this could be ascertained, American troops were to be massed at the point of intended attack—which was probably the best that the Commander-in-Chief could do, with fifteen

AMERICAN TROOPS ON LONG ISLAND

miles of fortified front imperfectly garrisoned, and one-third of the army in Brooklyn helpless with fever.

Points of locality were soon well known to Howe. He was possessed of numerous spies, and was assisted by such loyalists of the district as had joined the British at Staten Island, and also after the landing at Gravesend. He was able, therefore, when the time came, to find his way by native guides through lanes and woodpaths—keeping to the four main lines of approach previously indicated, yet really avoiding the barricaded roads, and the redoubts and earthworks thrown up around the passes.

Previous to the 27th, the British had shown some intention of making their way gradually, various skirmishes having occurred on the 25th and 26th. On the evening of the 26th, however, while the British lay so close to the American outposts that the pickets on the hills could sometimes hear calls and drum beats, fires were burning in the enemy's camp and there was no sign that anything out of the ordinary was contemplated. But when night had descended so that nothing was visible but the campfires which he purposely left burning, Howe noiselessly began to form his

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troops in marching order. By midnight all preparations were complete, and the start toward Brooklyn made.

The troops were in four divisions. The nearest, or Shore route to Gowanus, was given to General Grant with his Highland regiments. The next in point of geography, the Flatbush Road, crossing Prospect Range, was entrusted to the Hessians under General de Heister. The third, by way of Bedford, was in the hands of General Cornwallis; while the remainder of the army, conducted by Howe in person, and with Generals Clinton and Percy, followed the farthest or eastern road by Jamaica and the present Cemetery of the Evergreens.

It was the British intention to have Grant and de Heister engage Stirling and Sullivan respectively; while the other generals with one-half the army were to swing to the northeast, and, later, joining their compatriots in action, complete a circle which would enclose all the American troops without the Brooklyn lines. According to the understanding, Grant would—by right of nearest way—engage the enemy first. But he had orders to be chary, to hold back until an agreed signal from the other divisions should inform him

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that they had been successful in turning the Americans' left.

Grant's route from the Narrows along the Shore Road to that point between the foot of Gowanus Bay, or Cove, and the beginning of the wooded heights—called then the Heights of Gowanus, now Greenwood—where he was intercepted by Lord Stirling, is plainly shown on the accompanying British Military Map, and lettered *MM*. The opposing forces of the Americans at this point are also plainly shown but not lettered. Lord Stirling's position during his address to his men at the junction of the Porte and Gowanus—or Shore—Road beside the Stone House on the Vechte farm, and just opposite the mill-pond, is well indicated.

CHAPTER FIVE ISLE OF STIRLING

THE STONE HOUSE AS A REDOUBT

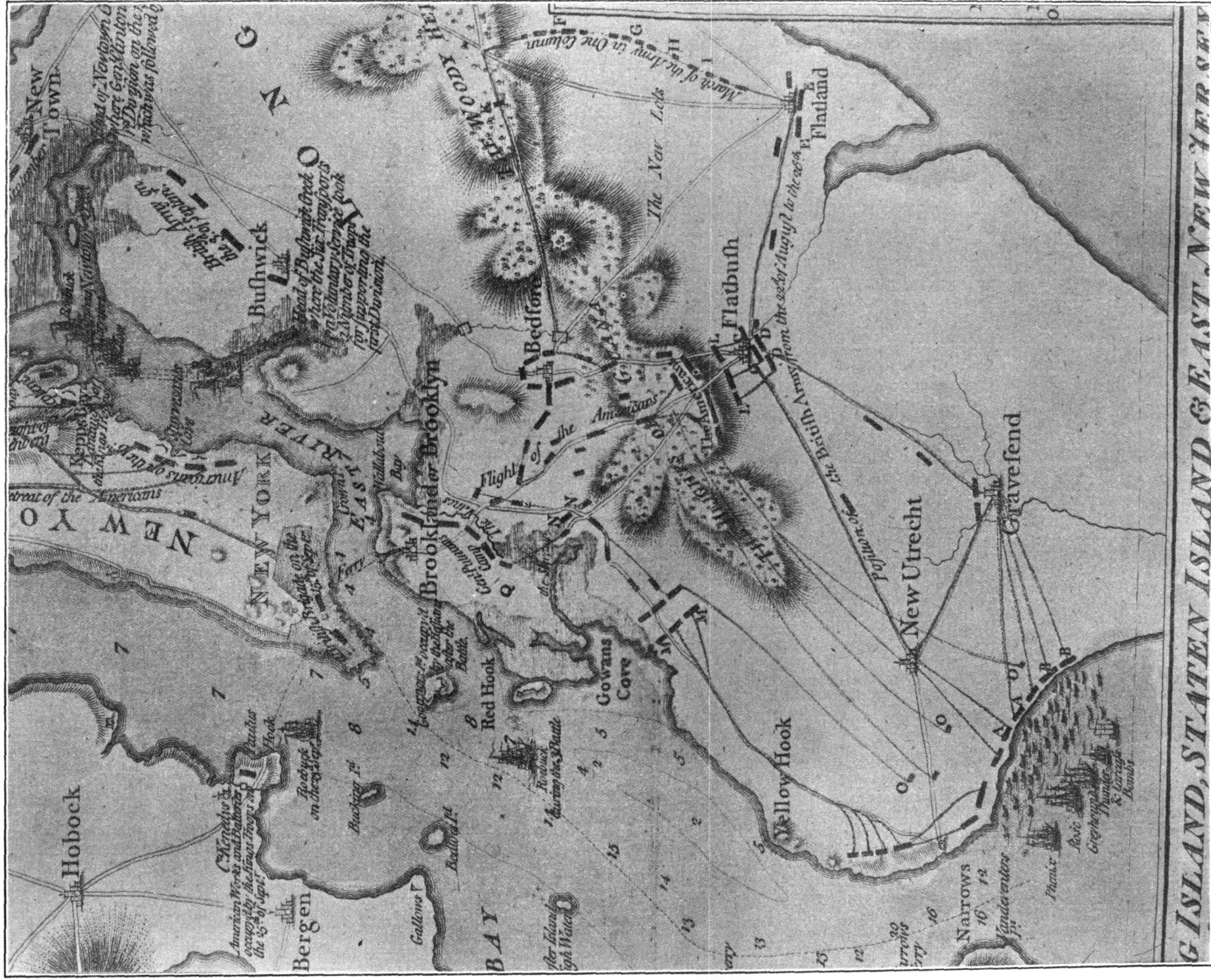
IT is a singular coincidence that in the battle which ensued, General Stirling, its principal figure, was fighting on territory to which at one time he had personally laid claim. Born William Alexander in New York, 1726, just half a century previous to this engagement, he had visited England in order to establish his right to the title and estates of the Scotch Earls of Stirling. These estates included property both in Europe and America; and, strange as it may appear, the whole of Long Island was included in the American portion. This island—called Matowack by the Indians—was part of a grant, which included Nova Scotia and Nantucket, made to William Alexander, First Earl of Stirling, by James the First of England. The English monarch had been a particular friend of Stirling when the former was James the Sixth of Scotland. Stirling was possessed of certain qualities which James lacked but aspired to. On the other hand, Stirling aspired to place and

TAKEN FROM "AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF HIS MAJESTY'S FORCES AT THE
ATTACK OF THE REBEL WORKS ON LONG ISLAND, ON THE 27TH OF
AUGUST, 1776."

MAP "ENGRAVED AND PUBLISHED ACCORDING TO ACT OF PARLIAMENT. OCTOBER 19th, 1776.
BY WILLIAM FADEN."

REFERENCES TO THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|-------|--|
| A A | Landing of the British with 40 pieces of cannon on the 22nd of August. | I | The baggage and its separate guard. |
| B B | Landing of Hessians under Lt. General de Heister, on the 25th of August. | K | A battalion of light infantry securing the Pass. |
| C C | Lord Cornwallis with the reserve, two battalions of light infantry, on the 22nd. | L | Lt. General de Heister attacking the front of the enemy. |
| D D | Lt. General de Heister, with his two brigades, on the 26th. | M M | Maj. Gen. Grant with the 4th and 5th Brigades, the 42nd Regiment, and two companies of New York Provincials, with 10 pieces of cannon, attacking a large corps on the enemy's right. |
| E E | Lord Cornwallis with the British on the 26th. | N N | A party of the Ind. Grenadiers, supported by the 71st Regiment. |
| F F | Lt. General Clinton with his van, consisting of light dragoons and brigade of light infantry. | O O O | Small parties of the enemy on the coasts, who, on the approach of the boats, retired to the Woody Heights. |
| G | The main body under Lord Percy, consisting of the 3rd and 5th Brigades with 10 field pieces. | Q | American lines in Brooklyn. |
| H | The 49th Regiment. | | |



THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

power, not being satisfied with the literary gifts which undoubtedly were his. As a saying of the time had it, James was born a king and aspired to be a poet, while Stirling was born a poet and aspired to kingship. However this may have been, it was William Alexander, First Earl of Stirling, who did so much toward the translation of the Psalms. He was a poet of undoubted talent, and was as well a friend of poets—particularly of Drummond of Hawthornden—but also became possessed of a wide range of interests, which included for a time the New World, as well as all that was going on in state politics and finances in England. He was the dispenser of the Baronetcies of Nova Scotia, himself the Premier Baronet, as well as Viscount of Canada—favors of James I, and Charles I.

When granted to Stirling by the Council of New England at London at the request of the monarch, the island of Matowack was given the name of the Isle of Stirling; and the Earl immediately placed his agent there, and collected quit-rents from the settlers. This ownership and agency, together with the collecting of rents, continued through the lifetimes of the Second and Third Earls of Stirling; the Fourth Earl, however, sold his

THE STONE HOUSE AS A REDOUBT

rights in the island to the Duke of York, at the same time that the Duke was given possession of New Amsterdam, changing the name to New York. The price was to be three hundred pounds per year. This, however, was never paid, and it was on the basis of this non-payment that William Alexander of New Jersey, when claiming the lapsed title of the Earls of Stirling, as well as their estates, included in this his right to Long Island. His claim was based on descent from the uncle of the First Earl.

This claim was not allowed by the Crown, but his countrymen thought he was justly entitled to its benefits, and henceforth he was known among them as Lord Stirling.

On the eventful 27th of August, 1776, when at three o'clock in the morning Stirling set forth from his quarters, the Vechte farm at Gowanus, to face the British foe, it would not be a matter for surprise had thoughts of his denied inheritance mingled with the loftier ones of patriotism. In any case, one of the most heroic battles of the Revolutionary War was fought that day, and on soil once an Imperial gift to the American general's kinsman.

Stirling's gallantry in the face of what he must have known to be overwhelming odds

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

was evidenced in the words he spoke after forming the men for battle; he referred to a speech which, while in England, he had heard delivered on the floor of the House of Lords by this same General Grant against whom they were proceeding to march. In this speech Grant had averred that, given five thousand men, he could drive all disaffected Americans clear across the continent. Stirling, referring to this speech, said to his men:

"He may have his five thousand men with him now; we are not so many, but I think we are enough to prevent his advancing further over the continent than this mill-pond."

According to Field, the tide-mills of Brooklyn "formed one of the most striking and characteristic features of the scenery. The sluggish streams where the lazy tide crept in its sinuous course among the reeds, were dammed at convenient points, and when the ebb had lowered the surface below the flume sufficiently, the clatter of the simple machinery announced that the run of six hours had commenced."

Speaking of these mills, Teunis Bergen writes: "The one known as Freeke's Mill, or the old Gowanus Mill, was probably the oldest. Its mill-pond was formed by damming

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off the head of Gowanus Kil. In 1661 this mill was held conjointly by Isaac de Forest and Adam Brouer, the latter purchasing the interest of the former."

As in the days of the Indians, when Gowane planted his corn in the fields round about, the grain still grew abundantly in Gowanus, and was ground in the mills called respectively Freeke's and Denton's at the time of the Revolution, or "Upper" and "Lower" by the soldiers. Denton's mill, however, was built by Abram and Nicholas Brouer, sons of Adam Brouer. The pond was formed by damming a branch of the Gowanus Kil, which ran at the foot of the farms of Nicholas Vechte and that of the Brouers. The Porte Road, which ran across the creek between the two ponds, was exactly on the line between the Vechte and the Brouer farms. The proprietors of these mills were said to have been loyally true to the American cause.

The old Gowanus road, which was "established in 1704, left the Flatbush turnpike just above the toll-gate, and ran south in the general direction of Fifth Avenue, until it reached the vicinity of the present Fifth Street, where it deflected southwesterly towards the present junction of Middle Street and Third Avenue,

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

thence following the line of that avenue along the shore.

“Branching off westerly from the Gowanus road . . . was the road leading to Denton’s and Freeke’s Mills. On the roads were the houses of Nehemiah Denton and John C. Freeke (time of the Revolution). These men had been merchants; were rich; and among the first in Brooklyn to use coaches or barouches.”

These names have caused much confusion in Revolutionary history, resulting in the impression that the action took place over a much wider area than was the case. In point of fact, except for the morning engagement with Grant at Greenwood, practically the entire area of the battle between Stirling and the British was encompassed within the space pictured in the frontispiece to this volume. The only bridged way over the creek and salt meadows was at these mills, and when the upper or “yellow mill” was set on fire by the British, the Americans had to take chances with the lower mill, or swim the current of the creek.

As for Stirling’s words to his soldiers—words of pride and heroism—they might have been realized had Sullivan been able to hold

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De Heister and the Hessians at bay on the Flatbush Road. On Stirling's side, everything pointed to victory till the rout of Sullivan left the way open for Cornwallis, and, later, those that had come by the route still farther to the east. As it was, Stirling advanced from his position on the Gowanus slope opposite the mill-ponds, beside the Stone House, and went as far as the foot of what is now Greenwood, before encountering Grant.

The British, at word of Stirling's coming, had entrenched themselves in the woods. It was as yet not near daylight, and for a time both generals satisfied themselves with sending out companies of forty or fifty men at a time. Indeed, it is said that Stirling was surprised at the British general's apparent timidity. This was explained later when, at dawn, Grant received a signal from the British right telling him that De Heister had met Sullivan and been victorious. Then ensued the real battle—as Fiske says, the first real battle of the Revolutionary War—beginning with Stirling and Grant at Greenwood, and ending with Stirling and Cornwallis at the Stone House at Gowanus.

For several hours the battle raged between Grant and Stirling, and Stirling was holding

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his own handsomely, when word arrived that the British were advancing upon his rear, and that Sullivan had fallen before De Heister, and was now a prisoner of the Hessians. Stirling was not slow in perceiving his danger. Leaving several regiments to continue the engagement with Grant, he turned back along the road he had that morning traversed. He met Cornwallis at the Stone House; the British general had taken possession of Stirling's quarters, and was using the house as a redoubt.

The Americans outside the Brooklyn lines were now in possession of but a small segment of that circle of conquest planned by the British. This consisted of the open Gowanus meadows threaded by the creek, and with crossings only at the mill-ponds. It was undoubtedly a beautiful sight on that summer day—the water, the waving grass, and the velvety slopes of the opposing western heights where were ensconced what remained of the American arms on Long Island;—yet a terrible place in which to be trapped for battle, as the sea rose at high tide and found its way through the tall meadow grass, which, concealing it, made a deceptive path of retreat.

At this moment, however, Stirling had no

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intention of retreating. He had succeeded with Grant, he had left brave men to continue that engagement, and with Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania troops, he believed that he could cope with Cornwallis, consequently he went at the task with his usual determination and bravery. Three times, it is said, he charged the Stone House where Cornwallis was entrenched, and where the British commander had placed guns, both within the house pointing through the windows, and without at the corners. And with each charge the British fell back.

It seemed for a time as though victory were to perch on the Americans' banners, and for a time it did: Cornwallis was dislodged from the house, and his guns taken. Indeed, the sturdy little fort—and sturdy it was with its thick, impenetrable walls—was the only point of real victory in the entire battle of Long Island. But just as this was accomplished, word came of reinforcements for Cornwallis. The whole right wing of the British had made successfully the long detour of the Jamaica Road, had found practically no resistance to the north-east, and was now—with Howe himself in charge, as well as Generals Percy and Clinton—sweeping

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

around to form that circle of conquest which Grant, Cornwallis and De Heister combined had been as yet unable to complete.

Stirling now saw that victory of arms was impossible, yet he would not surrender. Again his eyes must have swept that open segment of charming but treacherous meadow land which lay between him and safety on Brooklyn Heights. To the north, by the mill-ponds, he beheld a scene that must have momentarily sickened his heart: the British, in the last stage of conquering march, had set fire to the "yellow" or upper mill, leaving open only the causeway by the lower, or Denton's mill. But even this was soon in flames.

It was then a question of surrender or sacrifice—indeed of martyrdom—and Stirling chose the latter. In order to save the bulk of his forces, he called to him six companies of Smallwood's Maryland regiment of riflemen, and with these, now himself using the Stone House as a redoubt, he charged home upon the "astonished" Britishers, who had expected immediate surrender. Again and again the little host faced the rain of English bullets, sustaining the charge nobly, and holding their own until the last of the men had found safety across the meadows.

THE STONE HOUSE AS A REDOUBT

Thus the bulk of Stirling's army arrived safely within the lines at Brooklyn. It is authoritatively stated that of the thousands who engaged in battle, but four hundred on each side were killed; and of the one thousand Americans who were taken prisoners, practically all were from Sullivan's command. Indeed, General Stirling and his brave four hundred Marylanders so successfully engaged the whole of the British forces at the Stone House, that those who safely retreated carried with them within the lines the Maryland colors, and several prisoners whom they took on the way.

On the military map of the fateful year 1776, made by the British, and here illustrated, the line of American works on the Heights of Brooklyn is plainly set forth. The exact position of the nearest stronghold—Fort Box—to the Stone House, and the American soldiers' retreat therefrom under cover of the New York regiments brought over by Washington on the one side, and the Maryland regiments under Stirling at the Stone House on the other, is plainly indicated by the line drawn between Fort Box and the Gowanus road at the Vechte farm. The final course of the struggle at the narrowest space between the American lines

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

on Brooklyn Heights and the redoubt at Gowanus, may be traced clearly; also the position of the main redoubts on the heights of Gowanus overlooking the plain and encampment of the British previous to the 27th, as well as the various lines of advance, and points of engagement.

The centering of final action around the Stone House has never been fully explained in cause. This house was really equipped as a fort by the Americans; its walls were pierced for loopholes, and the main story reinforced to a thickness of six feet. From the house there ran a subterranean passage to the neighborhood of the crossing at the creek. It is uncertain whether this passage was built by Nicholas Vechte as a means of escape in event of attack by the Indians in the early days, or whether it was constructed by American soldiers after the house was selected for purposes of defense. In any case, the holding of this fortified position would add security to the American soldiers because of the underground passage. This explains Cornwallis's eagerness to capture the house in the beginning, and the terrific fight put up by Stirling to regain it. It was, probably, with captured American guns that Cornwallis held the house when

THE STONE HOUSE AS A REDOUBT

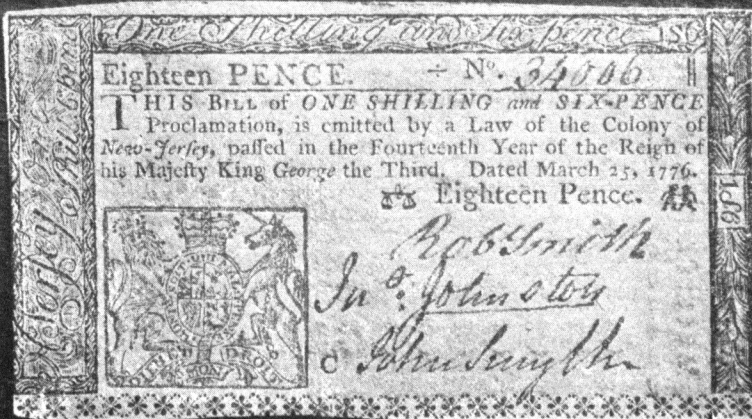
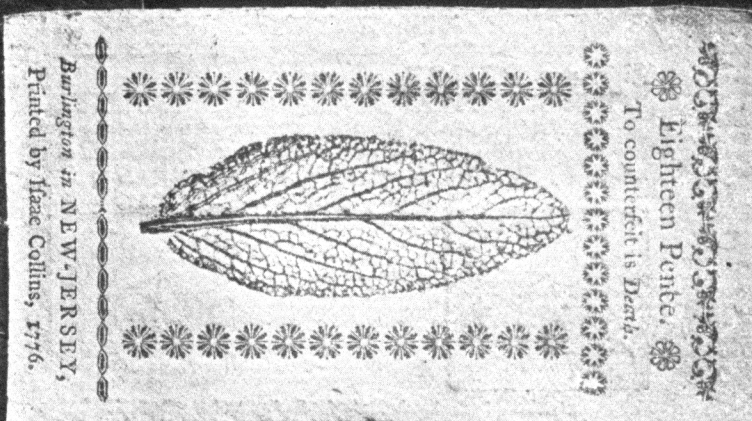
Stirling—turning back from Greenwood and Grant—marched to its possession. The fury—thus explained—of the Americans' attack drove "the astonished Britishers" from their position, as elsewhere noted; and they held it till the very last, when the whole British army on the island was bearing down upon it.

That some of the Americans escaped by means of the underground way, is probably certain while Stirling held the place; and possibly before, at Cornwallis's first attack upon it and previous to Stirling's final arrival upon the scene.

While the structure as a whole was too strong to fall before the English guns, it must have been riddled and injured in many places. Indeed, signs of the restoration of parts are shown plainly in the frontispiece; and it is the opinion of the writer that the facade was originally "stepped," according to the most elegant architectural fashion of the time, and that these points were so much injured in the battle that they were subsequently "filled in" to a regular roof-line. This assumption is based upon double facts. First, the angle-lines of masonry bordering fancifully both facades indicate that these rows of apparently decorative angles are of different material from

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

that of the rest of the edifice; second, the facade, front and rear, extends beyond—or over-rides—the roof, which would hardly be the case were it not clearly a projection for ornamental purposes. No sketch of the house antedates the Revolutionary War, so the deductions drawn are solely those from the premises set forth above, but which seem sufficiently strong. This mansion equalled any in the Dutch colonies of this period, if it did not surpass such, in elegance of architecture. And in this connection it may be pointed out that the best that could be had at the time would undoubtedly have been secured by such an innovator and successful monopolist of privileges as Nicholas Vechte proved himself to have been in the account of his special canal, and the outwitting of his neighbors in the private flood-gate.



COLONIAL MONEY ISSUED BY NEW JERSEY, HOME OF LORD STIRLING, IN 1776, ABOUT THREE MONTHS PREVIOUS TO THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. THE TOBACCO LEAF IS EMBLEMATIC OF THE ONE-TIME USE OF THE PLANT AS A MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE IN AMERICA. IT IS NOTICEABLE THAT THE PENALTY FOR COUNTERFEITING WAS DEATH.

Philadelphia 2^d January 1779

My Lord

I am fav^d with yours of the 30th Ult^o
with the information ~~given~~ ^{forwarded} I understand. I
the intelligence it contains
thank you for that ~~and what you have called~~

~~to forward the quantities.~~

I shall communicate that part of
your letter respecting Cannon Ball to the
Board of War and Ordnance, and if they have

not already made. Contracts for a sufficient
quantity, they may. If they think proper, make
them proposed to come to the Managers of
the Works under your Lordship's direction.
I return your Lordship the Compliment
the Season and am My Lord
Your most obed^t Serv^t

G. Watts

Lord Stirling

LETTER FROM GENERAL WASHINGTON TO LORD STIRLING NEVER BEFORE
REPRODUCED. THE ORIGINAL NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF DR. ROBERT WATTS.

CHAPTER SIX MARYLAND TROOPS

THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND

MANY historians have given vivid accounts of the Battle of Long Island. These accounts often speak of the Stone House "as partly of brick and partly of stone." This is a curious error, which, however, may be explained by the fact that the house which at present bears a tablet in memory of this engagement is of brick; in itself, this is now an old house, built long before the demolishment of the Stone House; so that the confusion of the actual sites, later noted, has caused confusion regarding the material of which the historic house was built. It was of stone, and that only until after the war when a wooden addition was built at the rear. Even as early as 1824, the Stone House was renowned for its antiquity; Furman, in his "Notes Relating to the Town of Brooklyn on Long Island," says: "Among the most ancient remains are two houses, one owned by the family of Cortelyou, built in 1699." He does not state that this is the oldest

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

house, but it was, undoubtedly, one of the three oldest standing at that time. And writing in 1834, historian Thompson says: "The oldest building supposed to be now standing in the town is situated at Gowanus, in the southern part of the city, owned, for several generations, by the Cortelyou family, which was doubtless a very fine and substantial edifice at the period of its erection, in 1699. It is a double house, built of stone, and was occupied by the Commander-in-Chief of the American army in 1776, a short time anterior to the battle of Long Island."

It is to be noted that neither historian calls this the Cortelyou House, merely stating that it was then occupied by a family of that name; but from these early statements, certain historians who came later fell into the error of naming it the Cortelyou House.

In the frontispiece, the hill shown in the distance to the left of the house, known as Bergen Hill, was occupied by Fort Box, named after Major Daniel Box, General Greene's "Brigade-Major"—this position is now commemorated by Carroll Park; also by Fort Greene, which was but three hundred yards from Fort Box. Fort Putnam (in the war of 1812 the name was changed to Fort

THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND

Greene) was, in the picture, at about that point in the distance framed by the edge of the trees at the right. This mounted five guns. Corkscrew Fort, or Cobble Hill, was close to where the City Hall appears. During the Revolutionary War an almost continuous parapet ran from Fort Putnam to Fort Box—the entire pictured distance of the frontispiece; and from this parapet thousands watched the conflict at the foot of the opposing easterly heights between General Stirling and the combined power of the British army on Long Island.

On the morning of the 27th of August, General Washington had hurried to Brooklyn Heights “two well-drilled Pennsylvania and Massachusetts regiments.” Later, others from New York were added.

“Along the space of ground that intervened between the line of entrenchments and the East River, several detachments, from the army in New York, were hastening to defend the passage of the creek, and to effect a diversion in favor of the broken troops, by threatening an attack. Washington had early in the day exerted himself to the utmost in bringing over troops from New York to reinforce Sullivan and Stirling; and now that their

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

forces were utterly crushed, he still strove to cover the retreat of the fugitives, and to strengthen his lines."

Fort Box was immediately to the west of the mill-ponds, and commanded the Porte Road which ran down from Prospect Heights between them. At this point Washington was stationed during the battle between Stirling and the British at the Stone House. Field says:

"Washington visited the defences at this point (mill-ponds) during the day (27th) and while giving orders to the Colonel in command, a man who seemed to be a citizen of the Island, was observed to have become inextricably fastened in the mud of the pond, while fleeing from the enemy. Some of the soldiers were desirous of going to his aid, but Washington ordered them back, saying that their effort would be unavailing, for they would be unable to extricate themselves and would thus unavoidably be made prisoners of the enemy."

The two mills were on either side of the same (Porte) road, at some little distance from each other. This Porte Road was much used by Flatbush farmers, who preferred going by Gowanus and a much more hilly road to the ferry, than by paying toll the other and nearer

THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND

way. The Porte Road was the second road established from the ferry to Flatbush, it crossing the creek at the mills, and winding up to the opposite, or Bergen Hill, thence following the present direction of Smith Street to the ferry.

Regarding the number of American troops on Long Island at this date, the "Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society" says:

"It is very difficult to form a satisfactory estimate of the number of the American troops on Long Island, on this and the subsequent days. Washington, in his letter to Congress, written on the 26th, says: 'The shifting and changing which the regiments have undergone of late has prevented their making proper returns, and the courts put it out of my power to transmit a general one of the army.' The whole number of American troops which crossed to Long Island at various times, before and after the battle, has been estimated from nine to eleven thousand; but the difficulty of estimating the strength of the force opposed to the British is greatly increased by the manner in which Washington rated his troops. In some of his letters which mentioned numbers it is evident that he referred only to the regulars, entirely disregarding the militia.

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During the battle, also, and on the subsequent days, troops were crossed in regiments, battalions, companies, and even in organized squads, which in the hurry and confusion were hardly even enrolled. At this time, however, the whole American force was probably not greater than five thousand five hundred men."

Regarding Stirling's troops, the same authority writes:

"Atlee's Pennsylvania and Smallwood's Maryland regiment, with Col. Haslett's Delaware battalion, composed the column with Lord Stirling. Cols. Smallwood and Haslett had been detained in the city on the night of the 26th, being engaged in official duty at the court-martial then sitting for the trial of Lieut.-Col. Zedwitz. At the rising of the court it was too late, as Col. Smallwood asserts, for crossing the East River to Brooklyn; but pushing over early next morning they joined their regiments on the field of battle, while these were warmly engaged in repelling the first attack."

The following clear account of what happened within the radius shown in the frontispiece, is from the same excellent authority as the above:

"Although the mortality of the day is

THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND

largely attributed to the dangerous bog and water of Gowanus Creek and its ponds, yet, when it is remembered that the battery which Cornwallis had placed at the Vechte House was now pouring its discharge of grape and canister upon every point of the crossing, it is not hard to believe that most of those who fell in the creek perished from these missiles rather than by drowning. The brave fellows who had toiled so painfully in dragging the twelve pounder through the sand were now amply rewarded by the splendid results of its firing. After almost superhuman exertions in bringing their heavy piece into position, they opened fire upon Cornwallis' battery, at the Stone House, and in a few minutes had the satisfaction of putting it out of range. . . . The British field pieces were probably light four and six pounders, and unable to endure the heavy shot and accurate firing of the little band of artillerists, so that although these arrived too late in the day to aid in repelling the attack of the British columns on Stirling, or to assist his devoted corps of Marylanders in their assaults on the Vechte House, they actually accomplished the result which that General designed, in driving the enemy's battery from the post."

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

Of these same troops, Field says: "The Battalion was one of the few uniformed and well-disciplined organizations in the American Army, and was at once relied upon by General Washington for performing the most hazardous and important duties." Regarding their part in the battle at the Stone House, the same author states:

"So fierce and persistent was the onset of the Battalion that the British were driven in confusion from their battery at the Stone House on the Gowanus Road. The guns would have been spiked or turned upon the enemy but for the brave fire of the grenadiers, who had flung themselves into the house, the strong walls of which made it a formidable redoubt.

"For more than an hour the Battalion had maintained the terrible fire concentrating upon them, and *five times* assaulted an enemy more *than twenty times* their strength. Shattered at every charge upon their impregnable lines, their discipline, their ardor, and their heroism restored their regimental order at every repulse."

Now, "beneath the streets and *vacant lots* lie the remainder of these brave sons of Maryland."

According to Field, "The officers (of the

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American army) give Lord Stirling the character of as brave a man as ever lived."

The following British account of the action at Gowanus—written, in fact, by General Howe himself—gives accurate data of their own movements; at the same time, their explanation of why they did not hold the Stone House at the critical period, is highly interesting as well as amusing. This, indeed, was the one point of victory for the Americans, though it was admirably backed by General Stirling's encounter with Grant at Greenwood.

"About midnight he (Grant) fell in with their (Americans') advanced parties, and at daybreak with a large corps, having cannon, and advantageously posted, with whom there was a skirmishing and cannonade for some hours, until by the firing at Brooklyn the rebels, suspecting their retreat would be cut off, made a movement to their right in order to secure it across a swamp and creek that covered the right of their works."

At the point farthest north on the march of the British army to Gowanus, at two o'clock of the morning of the fateful 27th of August, there occurred the scene at the "Rising Sun Tavern" between William Howard, its proprietor, on the one hand, and Generals Howe,

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Percy, Cornwallis, and Clinton, on the other. This point is marked by the junction of the roads on the "Woody Heights." The British generals were seeking a guide for the advance from this point over the path or "pass" in these same "Woody Heights" to Bedford, in their march to Gowanus. At the butts of their pistols, Howard was forced to conduct them along the unguarded pass, and thus made possible their descent upon Stirling's forces between the mill-ponds and the Stone House.

Some of Cornwallis's forces had traversed the pass from Flatbush to Bedford over Prospect Range, and these Cornwallis later joined, and with them made the first attack upon Stirling's redoubt.

Some authorities give Sullivan, and some Stirling, the entire command without the lines at Brooklyn. The probabilities are that each was in charge of his particular territory—Sullivan to the east and north, Stirling to the south and west. Putnam, who on the 27th was in charge of Brooklyn Heights, gave very little account of himself during the battle. His ignorance of matters, owing probably to his recent command, furnishes what excuse there was.

General Sullivan's position is clearly repre-

THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND

sented on the war map as facing, from Prospect Heights, the British before him at Flatbush. From this point, the march of the victorious British straight down the old Porte Road to the Stone House, is clearly indicated. So, from west, from north, from south, came the entire British forces upon the home of old Claes Vechte.

Perhaps the memories of that day drove the last Nicholas of whom we have any knowledge away from Gowanus and the home of his ancestors. For what was left for him?—A riddled hearth, a blood-soaked field, pictures of brave, fighting, fleeing, wounded, dying men. Some other home he sought. And when the years of the war passed, when fresh young leaves pierced the sod, when the dead were buried, and nature had thrown its mantle of peace over the scene of strife, others came to occupy the brave old house—eyes which had not witnessed the fearful struggle without, nor the demolition within. And again, the house, the orchard and wood at the back, the garden at the side, the meadows before, the creek and bay in the distance, became the scenes of domesticity. But the word of the strife would never pass—not even when walls were buried like the very soldiers who fell

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

around them, nor when green fields became streets for city feet to tread. The old Stone House at Gowanus, and its fields and creek, have become history.

A little below the mill-ponds, in the creek, there was the island mentioned by the Labadists during their visit to Gowanus. Upon this island, situated about at Second Street near the present canal, a great many of the Revolutionary unknown heroes were buried. This occurred both immediately after the battle—when the residents of Gowanus were compelled to bury the dead that lay upon their lands—and during the succeeding years when the plows of the farmers upturned the bones that lay as near the surface of the ground as their furrows. This burying place has never been disturbed; only the surrounding area has been filled, and undoubtedly the surface of the spot itself raised several feet. Here, therefore, lie most of the bones of the brave young Marylanders who gave their lives at the Stone House that their fellow-soldiers might find safety. It was of these soldiers that, “on the 16th of August, the Maryland Council of Safety announced to our delegates in Congress, ‘We shall have with you in a few days four thousand men,

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which is all that we can arm and equip, and the people of New York, *for whom we have great affection*, can have no more than our all.' ”

General Stirling could not bring himself, when all was over, to surrender to the British Commander, and went back through the woods till he found the Hessian general, De Heister. He was then taken aboard a man-of-war, where Sullivan was already a prisoner. Of the numbers of Sullivan's men who were taken the same day, history has often spoken; on the site of Fort Putnam—later converted into a park called Washington Park—a monument has been erected to those who died while prisoners on the ships in the harbor. It has been called the Martyrs' Monument.

CHAPTER SEVEN GEN. WASHINGTON

RETREAT FROM LONG ISLAND

WHY there was not an attack by the British navy at this moment remains one of the mysteries of the war; for Manhattan, comparatively defenseless from its low position at the southern end, must have fallen an easy victim to the British ships, and this would have completely cut off any avenue of retreat for the Americans from Brooklyn. However, the presence of the American troops which were hurried over from New York, and who helped to cover the retreat of Stirling's soldiers across the meadows, together with the presence of the chief himself, undoubtedly heartened the soldiers within the Brooklyn lines. (See Notes.)

That night, on Prospect Range, and on the lowlands before the American lines, the British slept. They were happy in the consciousness of victory, and no doubt believed that another day would see the beginning of a siege of Brooklyn Heights which would ultimately prove successful to royal arms. They

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

were tired with a day of battle after a long night of marching—so tired that one night's rest was probably insufficient to inspire a desire for further action. Added to this, with daybreak, a fog which enveloped everything was discovered to have made its way up the bay, so that the now nearby line of American fortifications was invisible. Further activity was therefore delayed by the British.

Lord Howe thought this delay advantageous; it would give his soldiers time for further rest. But Washington took no rest. He went to and fro, conferring with his generals, examining his own and the enemy's position, and speculating upon the advisability of this or that course of action.

It was no part of Washington's plan to allow himself to be hemmed in on the Heights of Brooklyn with the enemy around by water and land. With another day of fog, his preparations were completed. He had sent orders to Manhattan for every available craft to be centered in the East River, extending from about the point of the present Brooklyn Bridge terminal to Wallabout Bay—that section where the river was narrowest and best out of reach of the British ships. Yet, so close were these ships, and so near the British



BRONZE TABLET, FOUR AND ONE-HALF BY FIVE FEET, ATTACHED TO THE BRICK HOUSE AT THE CORNER OF FIFTH AVENUE AND THIRD STREET, BROOKLYN, IN MEMORY OF THE OLD STONE HOUSE, CALLED THE CORTELYOU HOUSE WHILE OCCUPIED BY THE FAMILY OF JAQUES CORTELYOU.

"WE SHALL HAVE WITH YOU IN A FEW DAYS FOUR THOUSAND MEN, WHICH IS ALL THAT WE CAN ARM AND EQUIP, AND THE PEOPLE OF NEW YORK, FOR WHOM WE HAVE GREAT AFFECTION, CAN HAVE NO MORE THAN OUR ALL."—MARYLAND COUNCIL OF SAFETY TO THE NEW YORK DELEGATES IN CONGRESS, AUGUST 16, 1776, CONCERNING THE MARYLAND TROOPS WHO FOUGHT AT THE STONE HOUSE.

RETREAT FROM LONG ISLAND

camp, that it seems almost impossible such an array of river craft could have been gotten together without the enemy's notice; this, too, where there was plenty of Tory sympathy, and numerous feet willing to run on errands of warning to the British. It speaks well for the guarding of the American lines, and the quick action and manœuvring of the chief, that on the morning of the 30th, with the fog's lifting, the British awoke to find their supposedly caged birds flown. The Heights of Brooklyn were deserted, and the Americans safely across the East River.

The British had lost a supreme chance, and Washington's untiring activity was rewarded. On the 3rd of September following, he writes to Congress:

"Since Monday scarce any of us have been out of the lines till our passage across the East River was effected. Yesterday morning and for forty-eight hours preceding that, I had hardly been off my horse, and never closed my eyes."

And not only were the Americans not satisfied with getting themselves and their effects from under the very noses of the British, but once on Manhattan Island they proceeded to Governor's Island—in Colonial times called

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

Nutten, and even later, Nut Island—which was but a quarter-mile from the Long Island shore, and three-quarters from Manhattan. This island is now the headquarters of the Department of the East, and is so close to the Long Island shore that, according to tradition, at one time it was possible at low tide to walk on dry land from one shore to the other. This island had been well garrisoned, and it was not the Americans' plan to leave so valuable an equipment behind; so having landed safely at New York, they went over and, according to the loyalists' own historian, Jones, who complained bitterly of the British laxity at this time, they carried away "two thousand men, forty pieces of heavy cannon, military stores, and provisions in abundance."

BRITISH troops were now in possession of the works so zealously pushed by General Lee and Lord Stirling. Over Prospect Range, across the lowlands, their tents swarmed. British officers occupied the Stone House and the farmhouses of the district; and up on Brooklyn Heights the forts of the Americans became the forts of the British. To the loyalists, this would seem a promise of better things and, no doubt, for a time they so considered it. But not long. Of the British occupation their own historian, Jones, previously quoted, writes:

“This day, though then looked upon as the most fortunate one that could happen for the Long Island loyalists, proved in the end a most unfortunate one, for instead of finding protectors in the King’s troops, they were most scandalously, barbarously and indiscriminately plundered; suffered every insult and abuse during the whole war.” He complains

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

that they, the inhabitants, "were well paid for their loyalty."

As to General Stirling, it is pleasant to state that he was soon exchanged, and was entertained by General Washington at the latter's headquarters at Harlem—now Washington Heights—on Manhattan. In an original manuscript letter in possession of the Lenox Library, and dated Morristown, March 3, 1776, General Stirling writes:

"At Long Island I lost two valuable horses, and all my Baggage, and in consequence of my captivation there, I was plundered and lost about five hundred pounds' worth of furniture."

A curious document of the months immediately following the evacuation of Long Island by Washington, and printed in New York by Rivington, chief printer and publisher of the time, throws considerable light upon points of locality. It is dated 1776, and is a farce purporting to set forth circumstances connected with the Battle of Long Island. Written as it was to ridicule, by enemies of the Republic, truth of character is absolutely wanting, its place being taken by gross falsehood. Yet facts of location were necessary to give semblance of life

BRITISH ON LONG ISLAND

to even this fiction, and for such it may be legitimately drawn upon. As to certain dialogue relating to the plunder of the natives by the soldiers, it is both curious and amusing to notice that the writer attributed to the Americans exactly the behavior which their Tory historian, Jones, recorded as their own. Witness the following:

SCENE: *A Small House in a Field.*

Enter LASHER and CLARK.

Clark. Behold, Colonel, these flocks and herds; with the sword of Gideon have I made them mine; and honestly collected them, in the district allotted to me by our agreement.

Lasher. I rejoice with you in the acquisition. My harvest from the Wallabout is like the miraculous draught:—two hundred and seven head of horned beasts, and thirty-seven horses, graze where my guards direct.

Clark. Favor has not been so amply manifested unto me; for from the farthest verge of Gowanus, even from Casper's house, till you come to Brewer's mills, one hundred and nine horned, and twenty beasts of burthern were all I could collect.

Lasher. But for some twenty head of cattle, the gleanings of Gowanus in the orchard of one Bergen, (see house on road to right, in frontispiece) I would not go so far; these once obtained, we will be near each other.

Regarding the above, it is a fact that with the advance of the British upon the southern shore of Long Island, and their subsequent occupation of the entire plain between the

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

sea and Prospect Range, the natives and soldiers drove the live stock of this district within the American picket lines, so that immense herds ranged over the hills and plains of Gowanus.

ACT II.

SCENE: *A Hill at Gowanus about two miles from Brooklyn lines, with an encampment on it.*

TIME: *About three o'clock in the morning.*

Enter a SOLDIER.

Sol. Where's General Stirling? . . . Sir, it is I that call, to inform your lordship, there has been a great deal of shooting toward the Red Lion within this little while.

SCENE: *A hill with troops drawn up, under arms.*

TIME: *Broad day-light.*

Enter SULLIVAN and STIRLING.

Sul. Let your brigade immediately take post in the bottom, and extend from the small house below, (see frontispiece) as far as the STONE HOUSE upon the left: and farther, if the hill gives them cover.

SCENE. FORT GREENE in BROOKLYN. (In frontispiece, hill showing to the left of the house.)

LINES. Centinel on one of the Merlins, looking out.

Enter WASHINGTON.

Wash. What do you so earnestly look at, Centry?

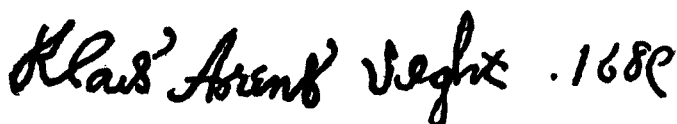
Cen. Look this way, Sir; there they run like many deer, and will get in: but the poor souls yonder, that come across the meadows, and attempt to cross the mill creek. Oh, what a number of these stick in the mud.

Of course, the entire document, as pointed out, is a mass of fabrication as far as char-

BRITISH ON LONG ISLAND

acter delineation is concerned; and the lines quoted are but to bring home more forcibly the "local color" and points of locality, which this literary effort of the day succeeds in doing despite its serious objectionableness as history.

With the further movements of the Revolution, this book has little to do. The scene changes, while interest remains with the Stone House, with Gowanus, and the distant Heights of Brooklyn. The British held possession of this region till the close of the war. With their evacuation went also many of the loyalists of the district—one historian stating that a third of the whole population of Brooklyn went to Nova Scotia—so that present day Brooklyn descendants of the time represent those families who remained true to the American cause.



FACSIMILE OF THE SIGNATURE OF NICHOLAS
VECHTE, FROM THE "HISTORY OF THE
BERGEN FAMILY," BY TEUNIS BERGEN.

CHAPTER NINE THE STONE HOUSE

AFTER THE REVOLUTION

IN 1790, Nicholas Vechte sold the Gowanus estate on which stood the Stone House to Jaques Cortelyou for \$12,500. From this period on, the house was known either as the Stone House, or the Washington House—from Washington's presence there previous to the battle, in consequence of which it was often referred to as Washington's Headquarters on Long Island, the picture of the house frequently being so designated.

Jaques Cortelyou was direct in descent from Jaques Cortelyou, the original owner of the first stone house at New Utrecht—the same house that was occupied by General Howe upon the British landing at New Utrecht, and which later became a part of Fort Hamilton, on the Narrows, and was included in the barracks up to modern times. (Large Map.)

The Cortelyou House at New Utrecht was visited by the previously mentioned Labadist travelers in 1679, though as early as 1665, records have it that "Jaques Cortelleau,

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

younger hope," lived at New Utrecht. They state that the house of Jaques Cortelleau was the second one built by the owner, the first having been destroyed by fire; and in this they are confirmed by contemporary records, which add that the inhabitants of the surrounding region were asked to contribute a day's labor toward the erection of Jaques Cortelleau's new house, he having been grievously afflicted by fire.

Evidently, the second house was intended to withstand both fire and time, as it was of the same strength and durability as the Stone House at Gowanus, bought by Jaques' descendant of the same name, surviving from the Seventeenth till the last half of the Nineteenth Century. (See Notes.)

The Labadists became great friends of Jaques Cortelyou, whom they describe at that time as quite an old man. They made several visits to his home, and at one time thought of buying from him a tract of land owned by himself and "several partners" on the Passaic River in New Jersey. Of one of these visits to him, starting from New York, they write:

"We both left about noon to go over to Long Island, and passed through Breucklen and Vlacke Bos (Flatbush, thus taking a dif-

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ferent route from previous ones by Gowanus) over New Utrecht on a large, fine wagon road to Najack (the part of New Utrecht occupied by the Nyack Indians, upon whose land Jaques Cortelyou had built), where we arrived about three o'clock. It had been very warm through the day, and we were all in perspiration and fatigued. After we had rested and eaten something, we went outside upon the banks of this beautiful bay, to breathe a little air, and look at several vessels going and coming." Jaques "had been to the fish *fuyck*, which they had lying there upon the shore and out of which they had taken at noon some fine fish. . . . The day before he had shot a woodcock and partridge before the door of the House."

At the time of the Labadists' visit, Cortelyou was paying the Indians twenty bushels of corn a year as rent for his land. He is spoken of by writers of his time as a "mathamatician, a sworn land surveyor, and a doctor of medicine." He enjoyed the position of "official surveyor" to New Amsterdam, and he it was who, in 1653, made that map of New Amsterdam ordered by the Governor, which present generations long searched for.

The office of surveyor descended in the

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family; in 1704 Peter Cortelyou was one of three men appointed to lay out the King's Highway, later Fulton Street, Brooklyn.

The bronze tablet, placed by the Sons of the Revolution on the house now standing on the southwest corner of Third Street and Fifth Avenue, bears the following inscription:

"THE SITE OF THE OLD CORTELYOU HOUSE ON THE BATTLEFIELD OF LONG ISLAND. HERE ON THE 27TH OF AUGUST, 1776—TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY OUT OF FOUR HUNDRED BRAVE MARYLAND SOLDIERS UNDER THE COMMAND OF LORD STIRLING WERE KILLED IN COMBAT WITH BRITISH TROOPS UNDER CORNWALLIS."

Above the inscription there is etched an imaginary picture of the conflict. The house is represented close at hand, two stories and a half in height and situated just at the rise of a hill.

As a matter of fact, this should not be called the Cortelyou House of history, the latter, as explained above, having been situated at New Utrecht; moreover, the house represented and thus honored in the tablet—the Stone

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House of Gowanus—was not on the site of the brick dwelling to which the tablet is attached. The famous house stood some one hundred feet to the rear or west of the present edifice, and about fifty to the left or south. The southwest corner of the house was nearly coincident with the old willow tree which still stands on the property. As a young tree, this willow appears in certain of the later sketches of the house which were used as illustrations to histories, and which are subsequently described in detail in this chapter.

At the time of its final destruction, some twelve years previous to this writing, the house occupied a corner of what was the Washington Park—so-named from the house—Baseball Grounds, and was used by the players as a club house. The wooden addition to the rear was the part mainly used by the boys, and according to Mr. John Moore, a resident of the locality since the fifties, they gained entrance by jumping down through door or windows.

As the house, in history, was always described as two stories and a half, it became a current fallacy of later days that the original roof had disappeared, and with it one of the stories. But this is inconsistent with the fact

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that the house retained to the end its original gable with the date, 1699, affixed to it.

Referring to the frontispiece of this volume, it is to be noted that the wooden addition spoken of by Mr. Moore is not only well above ground, but has a foundation ample in height. To have made it necessary to "jump down" through door or windows in order to gain entrance, the house must have been buried to a point above the pictured or original doorsill, thus reducing the visible portion of the house to a story and a half; and that this was the case is practically assured from the fact that the slope shown in the painting at the back of the house had even then long since vanished—the undulating wooded hills of this slope having given place to the gradual, even descent from the park to-day.

Mr. Litchfield, whose grandfather bought the property from the Cortelyous in 1846 and extended Third Street across the lowlands, states that the street was sixteen feet above the level of the meadows; so that the original ground level of the Stone House would thus have been sixteen feet below the present surface—confirming eye-witnesses that the house appeared as though "in a hollow" even after having been buried to its second story.



THE OLD WILLOW TREE, WHICH STOOD NEAR THE DOOR OF THE STONE HOUSE AS IT LOOKS TO-DAY. IT IS SHOWN AS A SAPLING, REACHING ABOUT THE EAVES, IN THE TWO PRINTS AND THE LITHOGRAPH ELSEWHERE REPRODUCED.

"BENEATH THESE STREETS AND VACANT LOTS LIE THE REMAINDER OF THOSE BRAVE SONS OF MARYLAND."—FIELD.



SECTION OF THE TRUNK OF THE OLD WILLOW TREE WHICH
STOOD NEAR THE DOOR OF THE STONE HOUSE, SHOWING
PRESENT AGE AND CONDITION.

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With the building of Third Street across the meadows, and the consequent filling-in of the meadows themselves, there also became lost to view the spring, and the brook which flowed from it to the creek—shown plainly on the farther side of the road in the frontispiece. Mr. Moore states that the spring is still bubbling beneath the ground, and that the stream yet finds its way to the canal but a few feet below the surface.

Also, when the upper house was finally demolished, the stones which composed it were thrown in to make filling, so that there remains to-day beneath the turf of this historic area, not only the spring and brook, but the foundation and lower floor of the house intact, and practically the entire material of the second floor and gable.

The brass figures upon the gable-ends remained to the last. They were over two feet in height, their supports penetrated the walls, and were firmly riveted on the inside. These were removed at the time of general destruction, and are probably in the possession of some person in Brooklyn.

Under its various names—the Vechte-Cortelyou House, the Washington House, the Stone House at Gowanus, Washington's Head-

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quarters, Stirling's Headquarters, Cornwallis's Redoubt; and with such captions as "Scene on the Gowanus Road," "The Oldest House in Brooklyn," or "Stirling's Last Stand at the Stone House," together with several presentations as an example of Colonial Dutch architecture merely—the house itself has figured largely in book illustration. The best known example is undoubtedly that in the Valentine Manual for 1858. This is an illustration of ordinary book-size, showing the front angle of the house. It is the only Brooklyn or Long Island edifice of any sort reproduced in the Manuals.

It is interesting to note that the same point of view, to a hair's breadth, is taken in the drawing of the Valentine Manual as in the picture of the house forming the frontispiece to Henry R. Stiles' "History of the City of Brooklyn." A certain post in the enclosing fence is depicted as exactly in line with the angle of the southwest, or right-hand, corner of the house. This is true also of the large full-page illustration in the Emmet Collection, which is styled, "Sketch on the Gowanus Road," with the sub-title, "Washington's Headquarters." In fact, these three illustrations are identical as far as the point of view

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and general delineation is concerned, leading to the conclusion that they were drawn from one and the same pictorial source, a few slight changes alone being introduced as suggestions of originality. For example, the frontispiece to Stiles shows the brook and a sunken barrel at the spring in the immediate foreground, with two young girls romantically near. In Emmet, the girls and the brook are omitted, there remaining only the barrel. In Valentine, neither the girls, the brook, nor the spring appear, the foreground being shortened at this point. A young willow tree near the door appears in both Stiles and Valentine. Undoubtedly, these slight changes or additions were often in accordance with facts of the time of the respective prints.

The young willow tree near the door of the house in Valentine and Stiles' frontispiece is topographically valuable, showing, as it does, its exact position with reference to the house; for this tree—now old, gnarled, but in season still garlanded with green—yet stands on the vacant plot beneath which lie concealed the remains of the Stone House.

FROM the village of something less than four thousand inhabitants during the Revolutionary War, Brooklyn advanced to the dignity of a town in 1816, and to that of a city in 1834, when its population registered 23,310. Having become a city, the idea of a City Hall was broached, and in the same year—1834—a triangular lot of land at a purchase price of \$52,909 was secured. At the time, this piece of land was practically on the outskirts of the city. The corner stone was laid in 1836, and work begun; but this was afterward stopped, owing to “hard times.” When, in 1848, the work on the City Hall was completed, the population had almost doubled, being registered as 90,000; and in two successive years, from 1848 to 1850, twenty-one hundred buildings were erected in the city, many of these extending southward, along what is now Court Street, edging but slightly, however, toward the lowlands, so that the amphitheatre of

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Revolutionary action remained practically as before.

But a change was imminent. Already, in 1846, a plan had been broached for the construction of a canal at Gowanus—this, in a measure, to follow the bed of Gowanus Creek, but to confine the waters within exact limits, and to deepen the bed so as to drain the surrounding area. According to record, the canal was to be “five feet below low water mark, four feet above high water mark, one hundred feet in width, and a mile in length.” The same report stated that the “purpose of the canal was to drain some 17 acres of land” at Gowanus, almost the area of the mill-ponds. This was also the size of the plot of vacant ground connected with the Stone House, and for a time, as previously stated, occupied by the Brooklyn Baseball Club. It is that part of the Stone House property which extended below the wooded slope and comprised the meadow lands. In the same year it was proposed to appropriate the historic seventeen acres for a public park. Had this been done the Stone House, with all its moving and picturesque memories, would have been saved for us of the present generation, and those who come after.

PRESENT SCENE OF THE BATTLE

The ten years between 1840 and 1850 really marked the commencement of the new or present city of Brooklyn. Plans for parks, for public institutions, for new roads, were begun, and in the main vigorously pushed. The "new" was the keynote of the time, and as is usual in such cases, the old was forgotten—built upon, passed over, and the loss considered but a necessary factor in the sweep of progress. It was not until later, when a sense of completion—more or less—of wealth, of culture, of leisure in certain directions, had settled upon the still growing community, that minds went back to that part of the historic past which had been swept away. With the planning of the Gowanus Canal, thoughts reverted to the part played by the region traversed by the historic creek, the meadows around, and the slopes on either hand. The central point of all, the Stone House, became the centre of interest, and it was at this time that the proposition was entertained to make the place a park and to preserve the historic house.

While this subject was so vitally in the air, the picture referred to so often in the progress of this story of Gowanus, was painted. This was in the year 1846, while plans for the canal were being considered, and before work had

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begun, so that the old creek still traversed the meadows, and on the distant heights of Brooklyn the new City Hall had taken on the dignity of a spire or cupola, but within the edifice work was still going on. It represents the transition between the old and new as, perhaps, no other picture in the world anywhere represents it; in the lowlands, everything remained at that moment as it had one hundred and fifty years before—in 1699, or 1776; on the heights changes were approaching, but the slopes were as yet practically unaltered.

At this momentous hour there happened to reside in Brooklyn an artist, Louis Grube, who was born in Kerzenheim, Germany. He was educated at Manheim, and had come to America to join a brother who lived at Poughkeepsie. He taught drawing and painting in the Poughkeepsie Collegiate Institute for a short time, and then removed to Brooklyn. He was thirty-five years of age, when the agitation began for the new Gowanus Canal, awakening, as it did, memories of the historic neighborhood. How splendidly the artist embraced these memories, and how perfect was his realization of the relation of historic Gowanus to the opposing and neighboring heights, how truthfully the representation of

PRESENT SCENE OF THE BATTLE

the entire scene upon canvas, may be realized from history and from geography. One can imagine the young artist filled with the enthusiasm of the history of the spot, at the same time that he reproduces with his brush the scene that lay before him at the moment—the still unmutilated, dignified edifice, with its lanes, its roads before the door, its stone wall, its fence, its shading trees—even its old Dutch kitchen, probably later devoted to other uses; then the oft-remarked meadows, lush from his brush, the brook flowing away to the creek which had brought old Nicholas Vechte's canoe or flat-bottom nearly to his door.

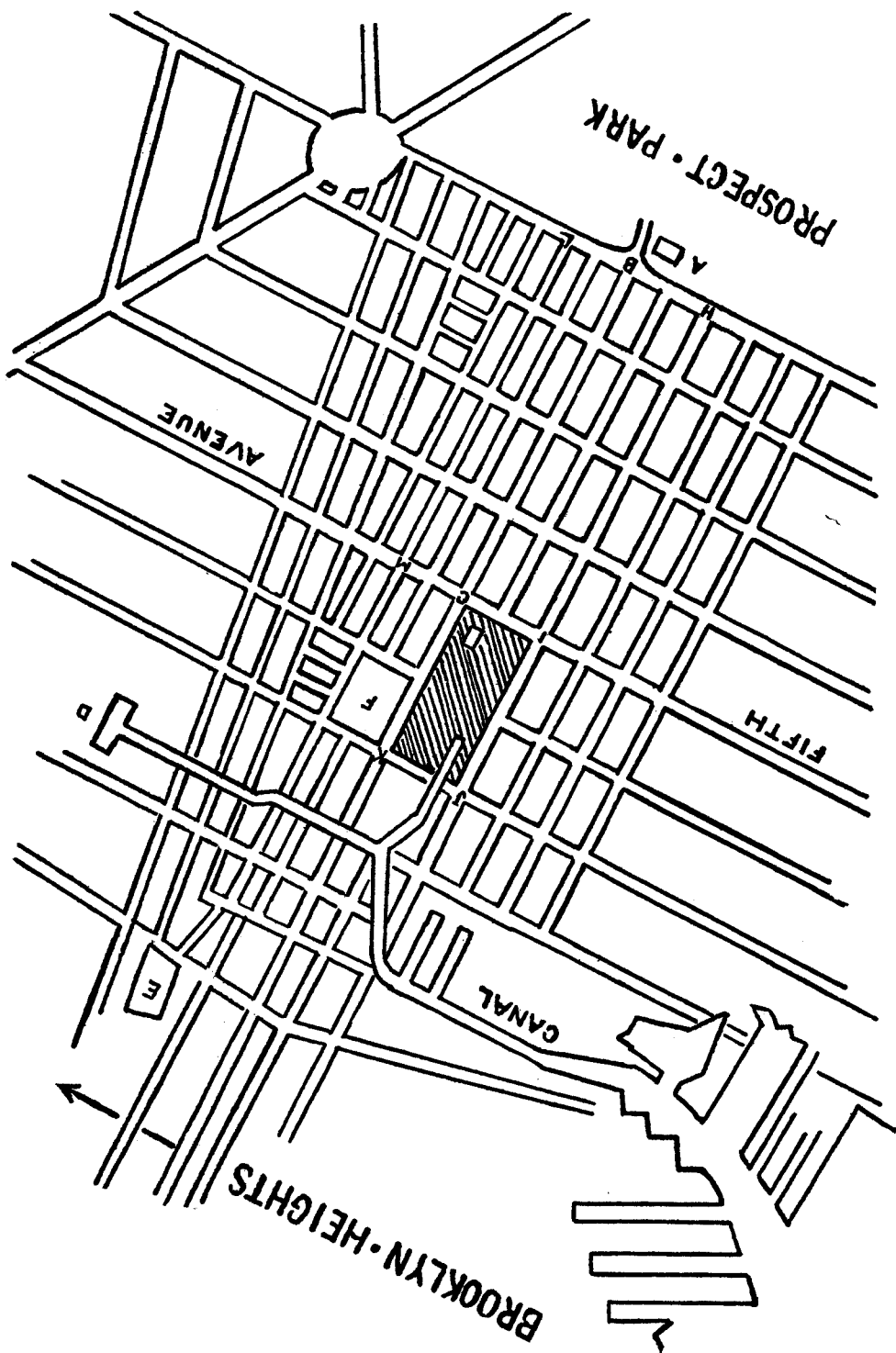
Then the scene spreads, and so glowingly and truthfully is this distance depicted it must speak of the painter's heart as one with his plan. There is the road over the slope at the right, the old road, with the snug little house on the near side—the Michael Bergen place, rebuilt by his grandson, Michael Grant, at the time of the Revolution. This family gave its name to the present Bergen Street, now four city blocks north of the head of the Gowanus Canal, or the Gowanus Creek, where were situated the historic mill-ponds. Still farther rises the uncompleted spire of the City Hall, and the two church steeples that were standing

SECTION OF GOWANUS, INCLUDING AREA OF THE VECHTE FARM AS IT APPEARS TO-DAY.

AVENUES RUN NORTHEAST AND SOUTHWEST. STREETS RUN AT RIGHT ANGLES TO AVENUES, FROM THE SOUTHEAST TO NORTHWEST.

THE VACANT PLOT ABOUT THE STONE HOUSE IS INDICATED BY SHADED LINES—THE POSITION OF THE HOUSE IS SHOWN BY OBLONG NEAR THE CORNER OF FIFTH AVENUE AND THIRD STREET.

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| <p><i>A</i> Litchfield Mansion.</p> <p><i>B</i> Park Drive continuous with Third Street.</p> <p><i>C</i> Fifth Avenue and Third Street. Bronze tablet commemorating Battle of Long Island on southwest corner.</p> <p><i>D</i> Gowanus Basin, head of Gowanus Canal—indicates position of Upper or Freeke's Mill-pond.</p> <p><i>E</i> Carroll Park, on line of Revolutionary forts. Position of Washington during engagement at Stone House.</p> <p><i>F</i> Present Brooklyn Ballfield. Site of Lower or Denton's Mill-Pond. Denton Place adjoins on the northeast.</p> | <p><i>H</i> Fifth Street, southern boundary of plot.</p> <p><i>I</i> South corner of plot, Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street.</p> <p><i>J</i> Southwest corner of plot, Fifth Street and Third Avenue.</p> <p><i>K</i> Northwest corner of plot, Third Street and Third Avenue, site of soldiers' crossing at Lower Mill-Pond.</p> <p><i>L</i> First Street—old Porte Road.</p> <p><i>M</i> First Street and Fifth Avenue, Stirling's right on morning of August 27, 1776.</p> |
|---|--|



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at that time. In the course of a few years after this painting, the entire area represented about the City Hall changed, the old hill upon which it stood being lowered so that a new first story to the City Hall, including the sweep of steps to the main entrance, was added. The differing color of the steps and first story to-day tells the extent to which the hill was lowered. After this change, the appearance of the locality altered rapidly; the old, low buildings shown around the City Hall in the painting gave place to new and higher ones; in time, these rose to such a height that the City Hall was entirely obscured from Gowanus.

Curiously, the area about the City Hall was lowered approximately the same number of feet that the area about the Stone House was raised. In consequence, one must climb the grandstand of the present baseball club at Third Street and Fourth Avenue—site of the lower mill-pond—or the elevated railroad at Fifth Avenue and Third Street, to obtain an idea of the relative position of the two areas as they were one hundred, or two hundred, years ago. The high buildings about the City Hall make up somewhat to the distant observer for the loss in height of the hill itself.

The lane at the picture's left lower corner in-

PRESENT SCENE OF THE BATTLE

dicates perfectly the position of the present Fifth Avenue, and if in imagination continued to the right, will show with exactitude where, a decade after the picture's execution, Fifth Avenue was cut through the hill adjoining the house at the rear.

With the new roads came new houses. The new houses must of necessity be on the new grade of the new streets. The present brick house of the tablet on Fifth Avenue was to occupy the exact spot indicated by the right-hand wooded rise in the painting. It came down, this rise—shovelful by shovelful—each one thrown forward to create the mound which banked around the Stone House to the second floor, and sloped in exact decline to the meadows, the fresh greenness of which hence became a monotonous stretch of desolate new-laid soil.

From this last state, the ball club came and reclaimed it, for the pleasant green sod, the well-kept surroundings of a prominent ball club, were much pleasanter to the sight than the preceding desolation. Now, since the removal of the club, the land is once more desolate, and the house gone. So we are to thank Mr. Grube for the preservation to us of the scene as it was before the vandalism of a great

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city's advance had annihilated its natural charm and hidden its historic features.

Louis Grube lived for many succeeding years in Brooklyn—painting in his studio in the old Athenaeum Building, and teaching art in the famous Lockwood Academy. He exhibited his paintings at the current exhibitions, and one, entitled “Butterflies”—is now in the Brooklyn Institute Museum. So far as is known the painting in question is the only historic painting of Brooklyn he undertook, and this fact is not difficult to understand when we realize the scope of the scene under discussion; for he had here a subject which took with its swing practically all that was of vivid or thrilling interest in the battle of Long Island, also the most noted example of early Colonial Dutch architecture in the city, and a glimpse of that Gowanus where was made the first white settlement, where was built the first house on the territory now comprising the city of Brooklyn. It represents the heart of historic Brooklyn as far as its relation to the course of the Revolutionary War and the making of the free and independent States of America is concerned. As such, it is of national interest. And a writer has said of this scene:

PRESENT SCENE OF THE BATTLE

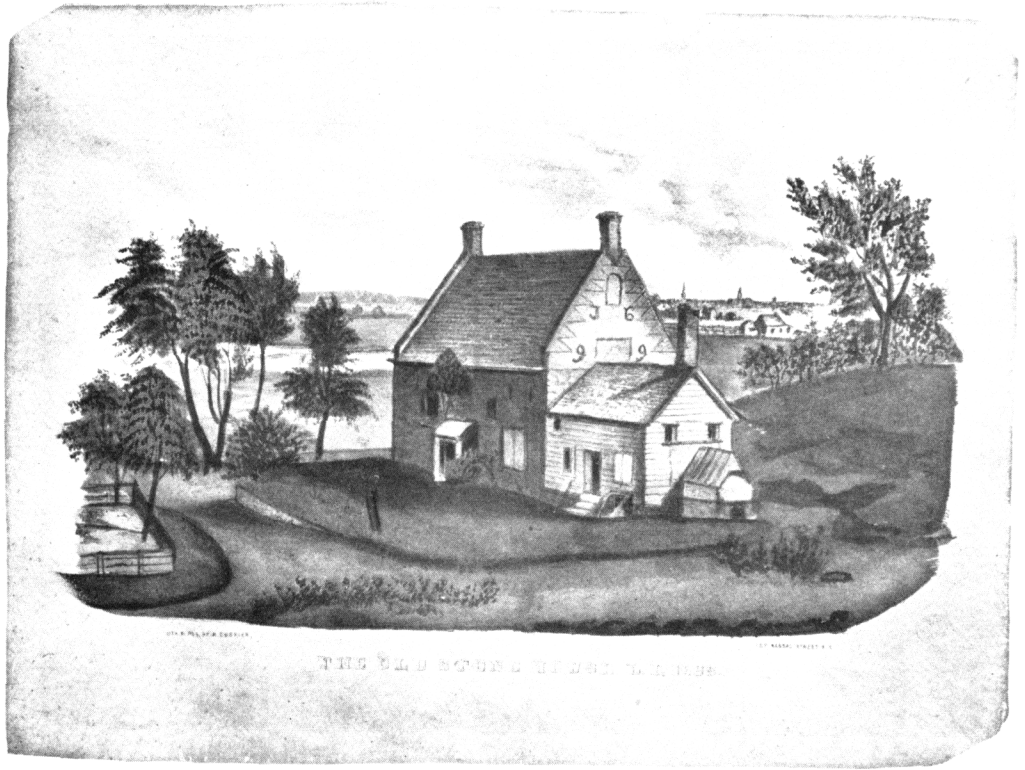
"The very dust of these streets is sacred. And our busy hum of commerce, our grading of city lots, our speculations in houses reared on the scenes of such noble valor, and over the mouldering forms of these young heroes, seems almost sacrilege." For here they fell and were buried, these "young heroes" who fought with Stirling, or who fell in the attempt to cross the meadows. (See Notes.)

Through the fortuitous circumstances previously indicated, the plot upon which stood the Stone House, and the entire stretch of the meadow before it as far as the creek or canal, and in width from Third to Sixth Street—is still unoccupied, though pressingly surrounded on all sides by buildings. It would yet be possible to uncover the spring and brook, and to unearth and set up the Washington House, the old Stone House of Gowanus. With turfed surface, bordering trees, and flowers where once stood the garden, this spot might again be made to bloom as during Colonial and Revolutionary occupancy. Washington Park, long its name, could be restored to it, and the house serve not only as a place of abiding interest itself, but as a museum for Colonial and Revolutionary relics. The iron figures recording the date of

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

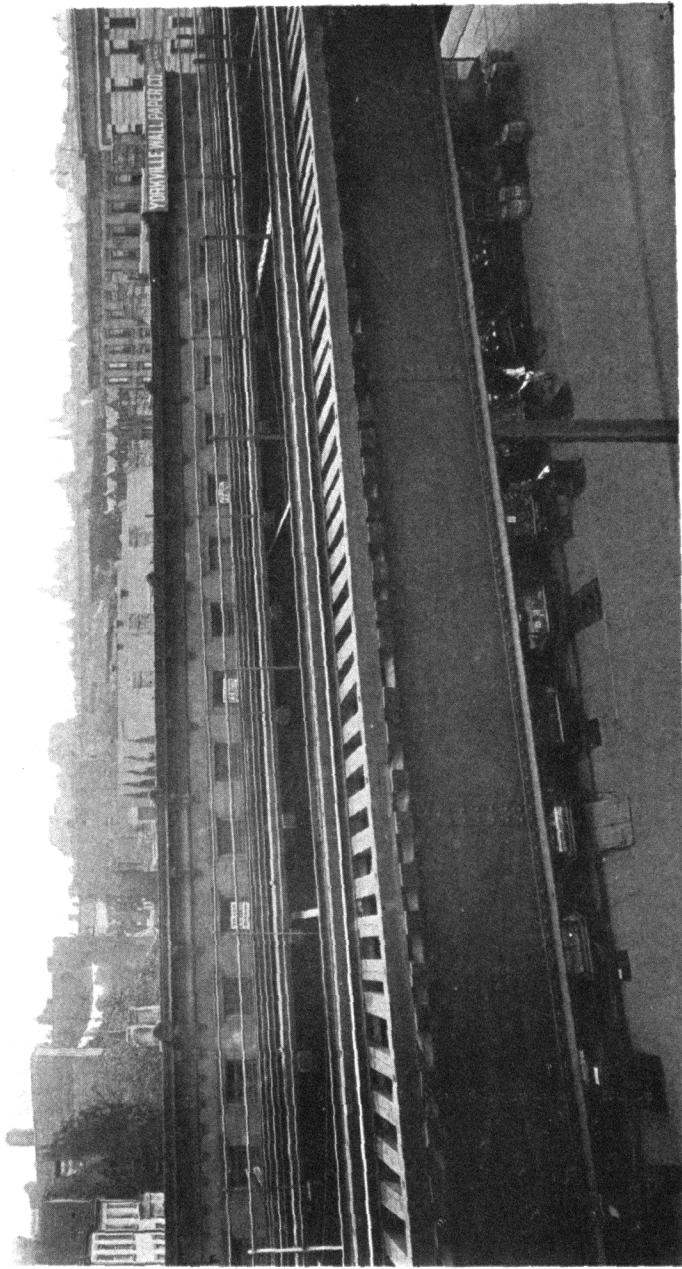
erection—1699—are still in existence, and might again adorn the gable; also a wooden tablet which, within the house, told of Washington's presence. This, no doubt, could be secured, the house furnished in duplicate of the days before the war, and a charming monument laid to those pioneers of our history who gave their hearths for their nation's need.

Such museums as the Jumel Mansion on Washington Heights, Manhattan, and the Van Cortlandt Mansion at Van Cortlandt Park, are wonderful revivifiers of the days which they represent. How much more so, then, this site restored to its original form, representing, as it does, not only a homestead of earlier interest than either of the above, but the scene of a great battle—itself the important redoubt; altogether, with surroundings, representing an opportunity for historic preservation unequalled at the present time in America.



COLORED LITHOGRAPH OF THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS, BY N. CURRIER, FROM THE ORIGINAL OIL PAINTING BY LOUIS GRUBE REPRODUCED AS FRONTISPIECE TO THIS BOOK.

"THE OLDEST BUILDING SUPPOSED TO BE NOW (1834) STANDING IN THE TOWN IS SITUATED AT GOWANUS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE CITY, OWNED, FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS, BY THE CORTELYOU FAMILY, WHICH WAS DOUBTLESS A VERY FINE SUBSTANTIAL EDIFICE AT THE PERIOD OF ITS ERECTION IN 1699. IT IS A DOUBLE HOUSE, BUILT OF STONE, AND WAS OCCUPIED BY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE AMERICAN ARMY IN 1776, A SHORT TIME ANTERIOR TO THE BATTLE OF LONG ISLAND."—THOMPSON.



VIEW OF FIFTH AVENUE, BROOKLYN, AT THE PRESENT TIME. FROM ROOF OF THE BRICK HOUSE TO WHICH IS ATTACHED THE BRONZE MEMORIAL TABLET.

I

CAROLINE AMELIA CORTELYOU, daughter of the last Jaques Cortelyou, and who was herself born in the Stone House at Gowanus, married Merwin Rushmore of Brooklyn. At the present time, Mrs. Rushmore's Colonial home is filled with treasures dating back through two centuries and more. Among these are silk gowns of antique patterns, beautiful shawls, old Dutch Bibles, andirons, lamps, candlesticks, silver ware, copper, pewter, quaint mirrors brought from France, a foot-warmer, chests of drawers, four-posters, chairs of Sheraton, and one "rush-bottom" of the exact date, 1790, of the family's entry into the Stone House. Besides many other pieces of antique mahogany, sufficient to completely furnish a modern five-story residence, Mrs. Rushmore is the happy possessor of a spinet which once adorned the parlor of the Stone House. Her manuscripts include letters relating to affairs of the Cortelyou family for many generations, as well as a slave bill made out by her grandfather, Jaques Cortelyou.

According to Mrs. Rushmore, all the bricks used for ornamental purposes in the Stone House, and for the fireplaces and ovens, were brought from Holland. After the demolition of the house, bricks from the fireplace were sold by Daughters of the Revolution at a fair in Brooklyn.

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II

AS the mill-ponds were artificial expansions of arms of the creek, it is probable that old Nicholas Vechte's privilege concerning the water of Denton's Pond in flooding his private stream had its origin in the fact that the pond really extended into his—Vechte's—property. The eastern boundary of the Vechte farm was at the Porte Road, what is now practically First Street; and in all the old grants or titles of this region, the boundaries extended in a straight line from the wooded heights in the rear, to the creek. This would have given Vechte proprietary rights upon the land below First Street as far as the creek. As the pond, when formed—about two years after the building of the Stone House—extended nearly to what is now Third Street—in the Frontispiece directly hidden by the house, and about the distance away of the present Fourth Avenue from Third Avenue—Vechte must have granted the use of the portion of his land flooded by the mill-pond, or else sold it outright, to his neighbor and friend, Adam Brouer.

III

THE town of New Utrecht extended from the Gowanus line to the southern shore of Long Island, hence included the Narrows, where is now Fort Hamilton, and the village of New Utrecht, some distance inland to the east. The Cortelyou House on the Narrows, which was occupied by General Howe upon landing, is indicated on the accompanying British military map—a line being drawn from the house to the village of New

Utrecht. Architecturally, this house did not compare with the Stone House at Gowanus; it was but one story and a half in height, but was strongly built of field stone.

IV

SOME authorities maintain that the British ships but made a feint of attacking New York on the 27th of August; others declare that an attack was fully intended and in fact begun, but that the ships which were sent up New York Bay could get no further than Red Hook—the southern point of Brooklyn Peninsula, guarding Gowanus Bay—where they were stopped, not only by the guns of Red Hook, but by adverse winds, and the outgoing tide.

V

IN "The Life of Lord Stirling," by his grandson, William Alexander Duer, it is stated that most of the correspondence which passed between Lord Stirling and General Washington is missing. In the preface, the writer accounts for this as follows:

"As the author is well aware that whatever of value or interest may attach to his work will be due to the correspondence it embraces, he cannot forbear expressing his regret that a number of the most important letters in the original collection are not now to be found. They were selected from the mass, and laid aside for greater security; but, as not unfrequently happens in such cases, they were lost—perhaps, through the very means intended for their preservation. This accident is the more to be lamented,

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as the letters in question comprised the correspondence of . . . General Washington with Lord Stirling, during the revolutionary war."

The letter—of which the facsimile is presented in this book—of General Washington to Lord Stirling, is, therefore, one of the lost letters referred to by Mr. Duer. Dr. Robert Watts of New York, the present owner of the letter, and who is the grandson of Robert Watts who married Lord Stirling's daughter Mary, informed the writer that this particular letter was found in the secret drawer of an old desk by a friend of the family, who then turned it over to an uncle of Dr. Watts, whence it came to him. The letter was written while the American Army was in camp near Trenton, and while Lord Stirling was actively engaged in military life in New Jersey, performing the same kind of hazardous feats of bravery for which he had been distinguished even before the Battle of Long Island.

That Lord Stirling's advice was constantly sought by the Commander-in-Chief is evidenced by numerous letters, one of which contains the following from Lord Stirling to General Washington:

"In obedience to your Excellency's request in Council the 6th instant, I now give you my opinion on the several questions stated, viz: That since there is still a very high probability of the second division's arriving from France, and of our soon having a superior force in these seas, we ought to adhere to our original plan for this campaign of co-operating with our allies, and with our whole force, for the reduction of New York; and then pursuing such other objects as the season of the year and the character of the seats of operation will permit. By departing from this plan, we risk everything; we can then have no other

objects in view but what lie at a great distance; and we shall have the opportunity of striking the enemy at the fountain head, with the highest probability of success, etc." This was dated Sept. 9, 1780, at Camp Kanahkumac.

General Washington followed this advice, acting upon it the following May in his advance upon New York as far as the Hudson; but the failure of the French part of the expedition at this point caused him to withdraw, and he then proceeded to Virginia. At this time Lord Stirling was ordered to Albany to take command of the Northern Division, as an invasion from Canada was then feared.

Stirling's modesty where his own ability and bravery were concerned is shown in his answer to the compliment paid him by General Stark, whose letter ran as follows: "I . . . am very happy that an officer of your influence and military experience has been appointed to this critical and important command." To which he replied: "Your friendly observations upon my abilities rather paint me the person I wish to be, than the one I sincerely think I am."

Upon the capitulation of Stirling's old foe at the Stone House—Lord Cornwallis—to General Washington, Stirling wrote to Washington as follows: "Rhynebeck, November 26, 1781. Dear Sir—I most heartily congratulate your Excellency on the glorious victory you have attained over the British arms on the 19th of October, at York and Gloucester in Virginia, an event, important in the affairs of Europe, as well as of America. It will weigh heavy in the scale of negotiations, and I hope, secure peace to the latter, on the principles of independency and honour, with permanent advantages to our generous and illustrious allies. I should have had the honour of expressing to your

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excellency the joy I feel on this occasion, much sooner, had I not been engaged on the northern frontier—whence I am just returned.” He then goes on to recount his experiences in detail.

Lord Stirling died at Albany on January 15, 1783, after a month's illness undoubtedly brought on from his untiring activity in the cause of his country. He was fifty-seven years old. General Washington then wrote to Lady Stirling:

“It only remains, as a small but just tribute to the memory of Lord Stirling, to express how deeply I share the common affliction on being deprived of the public and professional assistance, as well as the private friendship, of an officer of so high rank, with whom I have lived in the strictest habits of amity, and how much those military merits of his Lordship, which rendered him respected in his lifetime, are now regretted by the whole army. It will doubtless be a soothing consideration in the poignancy of your grief, to find that the General officers are going into mourning for him. Mrs. Washington joins with me in requesting that Your Ladyship and Lady Kitty will be assured that we feel the tenderest sensibility on this melancholy occasion. With sentiments of perfect esteem and respect, I am, etc.”

William Alexander, afterward called Lord Stirling, was born in New York in 1726. At the age of thirty-one he went to England, and while there became a friend of the Duke of Argyle, who, with others, assisted him in the prosecution of his claims to the earlship. In this, the Duke of Argyle probably felt the claim of ancestral friendship—that between the First Earl of Stirling and the then Duke of Argyle. The Argyles were at the time

in possession of the house in the town of Stirling built by Alexander, the First Earl of Stirling, and now called Argyle's Lodgings.

While only created earls of Stirling in the Seventeenth Century, the Alexanders were of the strain of the Scottish kings, Alexander II and III; and they were associated with the town of Stirling during several previous centuries, at different times the name of Stirling being connected with theirs. These considerations undoubtedly influenced the English monarch in bestowing the title of Earl of Stirling upon William Alexander of Scotland.

It was while he was in England in pursuance of his claims, that the portrait of the American Lord Stirling, reproduced in this volume, was painted by Benjamin West.

The blood of the progressionist flowed rightfully in Lord Stirling's veins. The cause of the people which he espoused in 1776 in America was paralleled in essence by the work of the First Earl of Stirling in his efforts in behalf of humanity, while associated with James I. of England, when he caused laws to be passed which, from their character, would rate him a sociologist to-day. These included, "Laws for the Poor, Laws for Apprentices, Laws for the Indigent, Laws Against Excessive Usury, Laws Against Brokers."

VI

ACCORDING to many persons now living, it was a difficult matter to dispose of the brook and spring during the "filling-in" of the Stone House property; but the problem was solved by piping the stream, and this is

THE STONE HOUSE AT GOWANUS

the way the water of the once charming little brook now finds its way to the lateral canal—previously the arm of the creek which extended into the meadow of the Stone House. Mr. Rushmore speaks of gathering watercress for the table from the brook, and this was kept up even after the Cortelyou family had removed from the house.

VII

IN views of the house shown in the Valentine Manuals, in Stiles' "History of Brooklyn," and in the Emmet Collection, there appears a Colonial-roofed house to the left of the Stone House, and apparently on the same road. This was the home of Adrian Cortelyou, brother of Jaques, and built at the time of the purchase of the Stone House. In the frontispiece, the Denton home, where lived the owners of the mill-pond, appears just to the right of the gable of the Stone House, between that and the chimney of the addition.

VIII

MR. TEUNIS BERGEN was the agent for transferring the property of the Stone House from the Cortelyous to the Litchfields. This was in 1846, when the atmosphere of all Gowanus was saturated heavily with the impending changes, as set forth in Chapter X. The announcement of the proposed sale of the property added to the intensity of the historic interest which caused not only the painting of the house and battlefield by Louis Grube, but also the writing of "The Life of Lord

Stirling," by William Alexander Duer, his grandson—written in this same year, 1846, and published the year following, 1847, by the New Jersey Historical Society.

IX

ALITHOGRAPH of the oil painting of the Stone House by Louis Grube was made by N. Currier, a New York publisher, at a period between the date of the painting (1846) and the year 1850, at which time the firm became Currier & Ives, and thus thereafter signed all publications. Here, as in many prints of the period, this lithograph while keeping to the main facts of the original painting, shows minor changes; there is to be noted the presence of the young willow tree near the door—undoubtedly grown to this height during the time intervening between the painting of the scene by Mr. Grube and the date of the lithograph; also there are slight changes in the grouping of the trees generally, the addition of a hitching post, and a porch at the main doorway. This porch is plainly out of value in the lithograph, showing it to have been pictorially extraneous.

While the grace and mellowness of the painting are lost in the lithograph, the latter well presents the artist's historic motive, the distance particularly having been rendered with considerable discrimination so as to bring out distinctive features. The lithograph is about the same size as the painting, and is entitled, "The Old Stone House on Long Island, 1699." To the writer's knowledge, two of these lithographs remain in existence, one being now in the possession of Mrs. Merwin Rushmore.

