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J. F. Wilson

AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
Centennial Celebration
OF THE
4TH OF JULY, 1876,

BY THE CITIZENS OF THE



TOWN OF NORTHFIELD,
RICHMOND COUNTY, NEW YORK.

Including the

ORATION

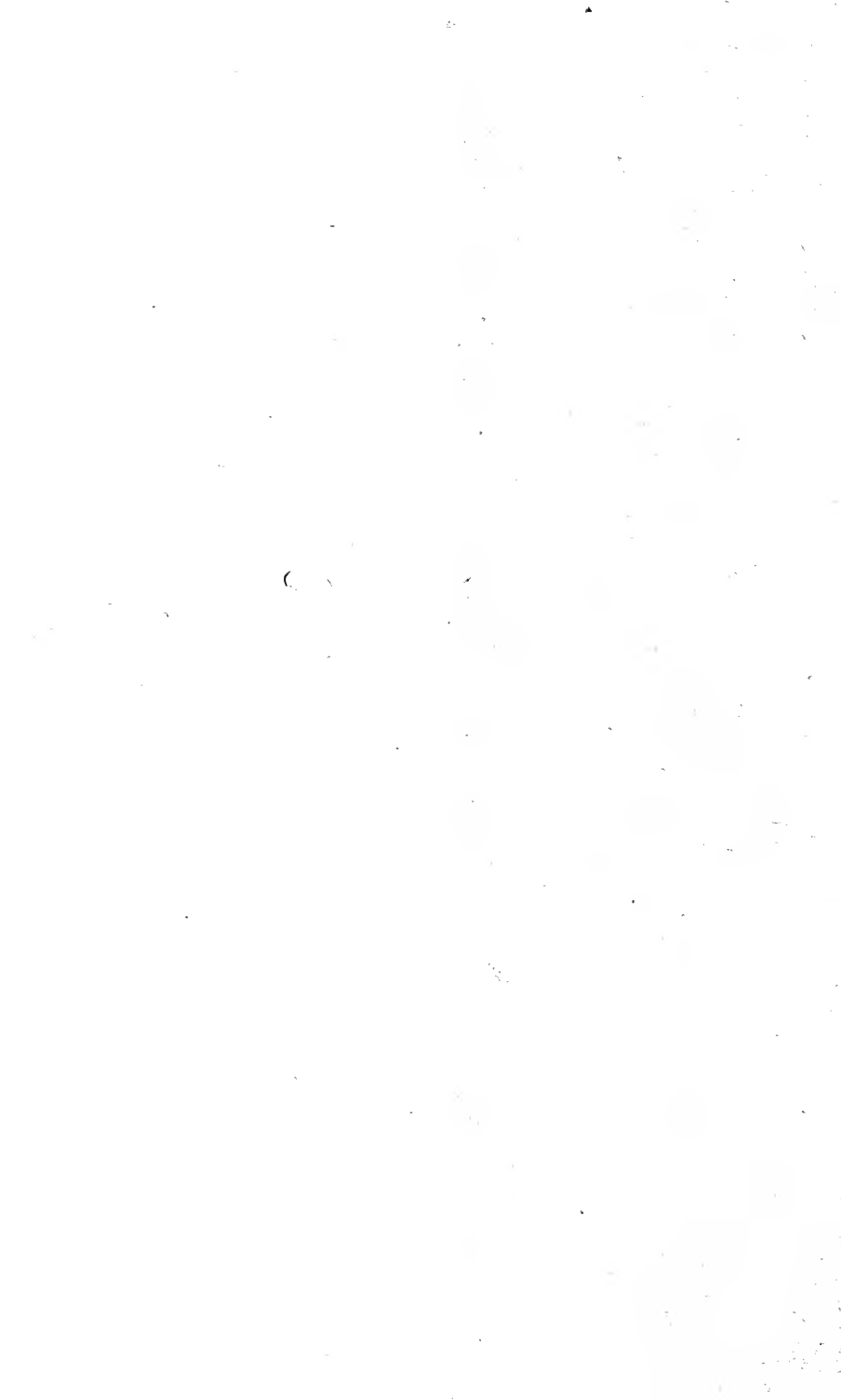
By Hon. GEO. WM. CURTIS,
AND
HISTORICAL SKETCH

By JOHN J. CLUTE, Esq.



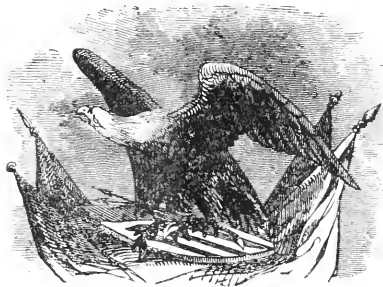
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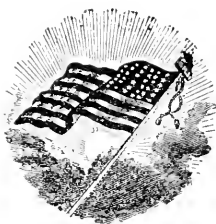
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The undersigned, the Committee appointed to prepare for publication a report of the Centennial Celebration by the citizens of the Town of Northfield, Richmond County, Independence Day, 1876, respectfully submit the following as their report :

N. C. MILLER,
S. F. RAWSON,
C. M. JOHNSON.

The Supervisors of the County of Richmond having, at a meeting of that body, passed a resolution requesting the citizens of the respective towns in the County to meet in their towns, and send five delegates to attend a convention at the Court-House, to take into consideration the proper celebration of the 4th day of July, 1876, the citizens of Northfield accordingly met at the Station House in Port Richmond, with Mr. J. H. Van Clief in the chair, and C. M. Johnson as Secretary, and elected five delegates, and instructed them to state that the people of Northfield deemed a celebration by the whole County inexpedient, and that Northfield proposed to have a suitable celebration, and recommended like action by other towns. The delegates attended at the Court-House, and afterwards reported to an adjourned meeting of the citizens of Northfield, held at the School-House, and their report was accepted, and a Committee was then organized to prepare for a town celebration. The members of the Committee were divided into Sub-Committees, as stated by Mr. Rawson in his opening remarks.

Beautifully printed programmes, with the airs to be sung printed thereon, were furnished to the fifteen hundred persons assem-

bied. The celebration was held under the shade of the maple trees on Heberton Street, in front of the School-House in Port Richmond.

The singing was conducted by Mr. W. L. Sexton, and the instrumental music was under the direction of Mr. Jas. Whitford. A large number of children of the vicinity were organized into a chorus for the occasion.

During the exercises a salute of thirteen guns was fired.

The display of fireworks in the evening was on a float anchored in the water off Johnson's Dock.

The residences in the vicinity were beautifully decorated in honor of the day.

In opening the exercises of the day, Ex-District Attorney Rawson, who presided, spoke as follows :

My Fellow Citizens :

There is one subject upon which we are this day, without regard to race, faith, nation, previous or present political, or other condition of servitude, fully agreed, and that subject, I hardly need to mention, is the due observance of the one hundredth anniversary of our birth as a nation.

Having been selected by my associates of the Committee for the purpose of presiding over the exercises of the day, which I deem a great honor, it does not come within my province to make any extended address, though it is hard for any American citizen, with half an opportunity upon this day of all days, to refrain from a few star-spangled remarks. I will, however, restrain my inclinations, and simply call your attention to the proclamation of the President of the United States, issued some time since, pursuant to a resolution of Congress, which, in substance, recommends that the people do on this day assemble in their respective towns, and cause to be delivered an historical sketch of such town from its formation.

The proclamation also contains suitable recommendations for the preservation of such sketch, to which we have attended. Another more recent proclamation requests the people to assemble at some suitable place in their respective localities, and return thanks to Almighty God, "who hath made and preserved us a nation."

The committee of the citizens of the town of Northfield have endeavored to comply with these recommendations by uniting with the accustomed celebration the religious exercises, and the historical sketch ; and the printed programme is now before you.

It has been deemed best to publicly announce the organization, under whose auspices this celebration is given.

The speaker then announced the committees, as follows :

Committee of the Whole.—J. H. Van Clief, Chairman ; N. C. Miller, Secretary.

Sub-Committees, composed of members of the Committee of the Whole, as follows :

On Address—Historical Sketch—Reading Declaration, and Religious Exercises.—S. F. Rawson and N. C. Miller.

On Music.—Messrs. Jas. Davis, W. R. Eadie, John Decker.

On Platform and Decorations.—J. H. Van Clief, N. Van Pelt, John Decker.

On Fireworks.—N. Van Pelt, Jas. Davis, John Decker, and Wm. H. Van Name.

On Finance.—J. B. Pollock, N. C. Miller, J. H. Van Clief, Wm. H. Van Name, Henry Miller, Jr., C. C. Jones, J. P. Kohler, G. P. Wright, and John I. Housman.

On Police.—J. H. Van Clief.

On Preparing a Record of the Reception.—Messrs. N. C. Miller, S. F. Rawson, and C. M. Johnson.

Reception Committee.—W. R. Eadie, N. C. Miller, Jas. Davis.

Ushers.—D. C. Belknap, Geo. S. Middlebrook, Theo. A. Thompson, E. M. Ford, Theo. M. Eadie.

The committee desire me to express the deep obligations they are under to the gentlemen who kindly promised to come, and, better still, are here to aid us in decorating the grave of the past century, and at the same time wreathing the new-born century with bright garlands of rhetorical flowers.

We are especially under obligations to Mr. Curtis, who, after declining several formal invitations to deliver orations in prominent places, which, if accepted, would have brought him much

honor, finally yielded to our pressing solicitations, and consented to address his friends and neighbors here to-day.

It is eminently appropriate that all exercises of the kind which we are now about to enter upon, should be commenced with prayer, and with that view I now introduce to you our revered friend and fellow-townsmen, Rev. Dr. Brownlee.

DR. BROWNLEE then offered the following

Prayer.

Almighty God, our God and Father, our country's God, by whose favor we enjoy this peace and prosperity, we come before thee with grateful hearts to acknowledge thy goodness; and with all our fellow citizens, every where with like purpose assembled, to offer Thee the tribute of a Nation's praise. By Thy grace, the child of a hundred years ago has grown to be a man, able to take a place in the foremost rank of the nations. We have been preserved in the midst of dangers from without and from within. Our material interests have been prospered till the world has been filled with wonder; and all is from thee. In the advancement of our nation in science, in art, in the blessings of a beneficent government, in education, diffusing its elevating influences everywhere; in religion unfettered, sanctifying our prosperity, and still turning the great heart of the nation to Thee, we recognize Thy paternal care, and we desire to stir up our souls to magnify and bless Thee.

Grant that we may never forsake Thy fear. Let no worldliness close our hearts to the higher blessings of Thy grace. May it ever be our honor and our joy to walk before Thee as Thy dear children, esteeming Thy favor more than all besides.

We pray Thee to look on us still with the same kindness which has followed us hitherto as a people. As we enter upon another century of our national life, may we resolve to seek our prosperity, above all, from Thee. May we be more and more a Christian people, not alone in name. May we honor Thy holy day, and take Thy holy word as the basis of our institutions. May we enjoy more and more of that liberty which the truth confers, and cultivate more and more of that righteousness which exalteth a nation. May God the Lord dwell in the midst of us, our God for ever, even as He has been our father's God, and may He grant

us the grace to do our work in His service, as a people, seeking ever to advance and diffuse the blessings of civilization, and especially of the religion of Christ. May Thy Kingdom come in the midst of us, and Thy will be done as in Heaven. So may we hope for the glory of the nation to continue, and our land to be filled with a people prosperous, happy, and blessed. We ask it in our Redeemer's name. Amen.

The audience then joined with the chorus in singing "Hail Columbia."

After which, the Rev. JAS. S. BUSH read the Declaration of Independence in an impressive manner, which was followed by singing Keller's "American Hymn."

Mr. JOHN J. CLUTE, of West New Brighton, was then introduced by Mr. Rawson, as the gentleman who was to be known to future generations as the historian of Staten Island, he being about to publish a history of Richmond County.

Mr. Clute spoke as follows :

On a beautiful morning early in September, two hundred and sixty-seven years ago, a stout, Dutch ship, called "The Half Moon," entered the harbor and anchored within the promontory of Sandy Hook. She bore Henry Hudson and his fellow voyagers, probably the first white men who had ever looked upon the beautiful panorama which surrounded them. Explorations of the land and water were immediately commenced, and while Hudson himself coasted along Long and Coney Islands, a boat in charge of John Coleman, his mate, was sent to examine the shores of Staten Island. This boat entered the Kills, and penetrated as far as Newark Bay, or the Sound, when the phenomenon of the tides running in opposite directions, within a short distance, mystified them, and induced them to return to the ship ; the mystery of the tides, however, demonstrated the fact that the land which they had examined was an island. In rounding the point at New Brighton on their return, they encountered two large canoes filled with savages, who, in their surprise and alarm, discharged a shower of arrows at the strangers, one of which struck Coleman in the neck and killed him. He was conveyed to the ship, and the following day was

interred on Sandy Hook, which, for a long time thereafter, was known as "Coleman's Point."

The Indians inhabiting Staten Island at the time of its discovery, were the Raritans, a branch of the great Leni-lenape, or Delaware nation, and the native name of the Island was Aquehonga-Monacknong; it was also called Egquahous, or "the place of bad woods."

After exploring the bay and its surroundings, Hudson entered the great river which still bears his name, and ascended as far as the present site of Albany. He was eleven days in ascending, and as many in descending, and one month after entering the harbor, he sailed out of it again on his homeward voyage.

The report he made of the beauties of the country, and especially of the immense quantities of furs which might be obtained from the natives, in barter for articles of trifling value, excited the cupidity of numbers of the Dutch merchants, and many ships were sent over at various times, the owners of which realized immense fortunes. Pleased with the climate and the fertility of the soil, permanent settlers at length came over.

In 1624, the first settlement was made on Staten Island by a number of Walloons, who, after remaining here nearly a year, removed to Long Island.

The West India Company, or "The Nineteen," as it was sometimes called, because it was composed of that number of members, had just been chartered in Holland, and in 1630 conveyed our island, and all the country on the main, extending from Hoboken to near the Raritan, to Michael Pauw, one of their number, whose name still clings to a part of his possessions at Communipaw, or the Commune of Pauw.

Difficulties which we cannot now examine arose, which induced Pauw to sell out all his rights to the country to his fellow members, and the same year, or early on the following, David Petersen de Vries, having extinguished the Indian title, became proprietor, or patroon, of Staten Island, or the greater part of it, and began to make settlements upon it. It was the practice of the Company, before confirming a grant of land in the colony, to see that the patentee had first extinguished the Indian title, or had satisfied the Indians and obtained their consent to part with their land. In some instances this proved a difficult matter, and

especially was this the case with Staten Island. They were always ready to sell it whenever a purchaser presented himself. In 1630 they sold it to Michael Pauw ; shortly after to David Peterson De Vries ; in 1641 to Cornelius Melyn ; in 1651 to August Heermans ; in 1657 to the Baron Van Capelan, and in 1670 to Governor Lovelace. To this last sale they were obliged to adhere, probably because there was more formality about it, the Governor insisting upon possession being given by "turf and twig,"—that is, by a sod of the earth, and a branch of each sort of tree which grew upon the land. Each proprietor, Pauw probably excepted, introduced a number of settlers. The first settlements within the limits of Northfield were made on the northwest extremity of the island, entirely by Dutchmen, which locality is to this day known as "Holland's Hook," an abbreviation for "Hollander's Hook."

In 1655 there was a great massacre of the whites on the island, by the Indians, when all parts thereof was devastated, and the settlements on the Hook suffered severely. In April of the same year Johannes De Decker arrived in the country; he was a young man of excellent reputation, and had occupied some official station at Schiedam ; he brought with him a letter from the Directors of the West India Company, recommending him to the first vacant honorable position. He came as supercargo of the ship "Black Eagle." The Vice-Director at Fort Orange having become insane, De Decker was appointed to succeed him, a very responsible position for a young man and a stranger, but he proved equal to the emergency. As he was the undoubted progenitor of the hosts of Deckers now so profusely scattered over our island, and especially over this town of Northfield, we will briefly follow his career until he disappears from the scene of action.

After he had assumed the direction of affairs at Fort Orange, now Albany, Governor Stuyvesant issued a proclamation against unauthorized preachers, from whom nothing could be expected but "discord, confusion and disorder in Church and State." De Decker issued an echo thereof, and adopted energetic measures to enforce it. When the knowledge of these proceedings reached Holland, Stuyvesant was severely rebuked, and forbidden to interfere with the free exercise of religion thereafter. In 1656 De

Decker returned to Holland, where he married, and in 1657 returned to this country again.

He had become possessed of a plantation of one hundred and twenty acres of land within the limits of Northfield, but by reason of some dispute with Stuyvesant, he was dispossessed, and, it is said, banished ; if so, his sentence must have been reversed, and the differences between him and the Governor reconciled, for when the colony was wrested from the Dutch by the English, he was appointed by Stuyvesant one of the commissioners for arranging the terms of surrender. The English carried out, to the letter, the articles agreed upon, so far as they related to the enjoyment of property, and the free exercise of religion, but when they began to remodel the laws and change the names of places, De Decker's Dutch patriotism was aroused, and he protested so loudly and so frequently, that he again became offensive, and was once more banished from the colony by Governor Nicolls. During the administration of Lovelace, De Decker applied to the Duke of York for a revocation of his sentence and the restoration of his property. The duke referred the matter to Lovelace to do in the premises what was just and proper, and the result was that he was reinstated in all his rights. Thenceforward we hear no more of him, except that he devoted himself to the cultivation of his farm and the raising of Deckers, in which last he succeeded admirably, as we have evidence before us at this day. How many children he had is not known, but among his sons were Matthew, Pieter and Charles, names we find repeated among his descendants continually, thus affording proof of their legitimate descent from their "illustrious predecessor."

Another of the old families of Northfield is the Post. Adrian Post, who was the progenitor of those of that name at the present day, came to this country before 1650, as the captain of an emigrant ship. When he came to the island is not known, but he was here before De Decker, for at the time of the great Indian massacre in 1655, he had resided here with his wife, five children and two servants, for some time in the capacity of Superintendent of Baron Van Capelan's plantation. He and his family escaped on that occasion, but soon thereafter returned and resumed his occupation.

The Du Puys also came here at an early date. Nicolas du

Pui, with his wife and three children, arrived here in 1662, in the ship called the "Purmerland Church," and settled on Staten Island. He was, undoubtedly, the progenitor of the Depuys of the present day, as we find his name perpetuated among his descendants. They settled in that part of Northfield which borders on Fresh Kill.

The Simonsons were in the colony as early as 1631, but it was 31 years later, namely 1662, before the name is found in connection with Staten Island. Willem Simonson settled here at that date, and though there is no record of the names of all his children, we find among them the names of Barnt and Aert, or Arthur, which are perpetuated among the descendants to this day.

The Corsens were in the colony several years before we find the name in connection with Staten Island. The first mentioned is Cornelius, to whom two patents were granted in 1680, one for 60 acres and another for 320, besides 32 acres of salt meadow, in the words of the document, "where most convenient." He died before December 7th, 1693, as on that day his will was admitted to probate. The grounds which we are now occupying is a part of the estate granted by that patent. His son, Cornelius, died in March, 1755, and lies interred in the neighboring church-yard,* where his gravestone, with its Dutch inscription, may still be seen. The original Cornelius is designated in the Albany Records as captain, and several of his descendants received military commissions of various grades—others were called to fill civil offices, as Members of Assembly, Sheriff, County Clerk, &c.

The Merrills are also an ancient family. The first of the name was Richard, who, with his wife Sarah Wells, both natives of Warwickshire, England, settled on Staten Island in 1675. One of their sons, Richard, was Judge of the County in 1739, and member of the Colonial Assembly both before and after that date.

The Mersereaus fled from their native France, first to England, and then to America. The family consisted of a widowed mother, two sons Joshua and Daniel, and two daughters Mary and Martha; another son, Paul, remained in England. They left France

* The yard of the Reformed Church. The gravestone of his wife, Jane Van Buskirk, also with a Dutch inscription, stands beside it.

immediately after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 ; they made but a brief stay in England, and left that country with an intention of settling in Philadelphia, then just founded, but were driven by a storm to seek safety in New York. While here, the natural beauties of our island attracted their attention, and they finally settled here, and in the graveyard of the old French church at Fresh Kill repose the remains of the widow, who brought her children here as the only refuge from persecution. Joshua, a grandson of the widow's son Joshua, was the first member of assembly from this county after the Declaration of Independence, and filled the office for several years. No name occurs oftener in the civil list of our county than that of Mersereau.

The first Van Pelt we meet with in the records of Staten Island, is Hendrick ; he was here before 1696.

The first Van Name was Evart, who lived here before 1709.

The Pralls were here in 1694 ; the Lakes in 1696 ; the Hillyers in 1693 ; the Crocherons in 1698, and the Haughwonts about 1700, &c.

In 1664, during a period of profound peace between England and Holland, the former power sent four ships of war to America, and wrested the province from the Dutch, from which time until the achievement of our national independence, with the exception of a few months, she retained possession of it. Under the Dutch, there were no political divisions of the province, but the legal business was done at New Amsterdam. The English, soon after taking possession, divided the southern part of the province into shires, and Long Island, Staten Island, and what is now known as Westchester, were comprised in one shire called Yorkshire ; these shires were again divided into ridings.

In 1683, the province was divided into twelve counties, of which Richmond was one, and the four original towns were bounded and described in 1688. The boundaries of Northfield are about the same to day as they were then.

The history of Northfield during the war of the Revolution is peculiarly interesting, but time will permit us only to glance at it. Staten Island has been charged with being a nursery of torvism during that eventful period, and General Washington, in one of his letters, speaks of "the well-known disaffection and treachery of the people of Staten Island." This is a serious charge, coming

from such a source, yet it might be materially palliated, but not utterly denied, did time permit. It is, indeed, true, that there were many tories on the Island at the beginning of the war, but so heavily was the hand of oppression laid upon the people during its continuance that, at its close, there were very few.

But at no time was the charge true as it related to the Town of Northfield. In this Town there was double the amount of patriotism than in all the rest of the County combined. This was owing to the fact that the majority of the people were of Dutch extraction, or French amalgamated with the Dutch. In this Town dwelt the Corsens, the Mersereaus, the Van Names, the Van Pelts, the Crocherons, and a host of others, all well-known patriots.

When the distribution of quarters for the British army took place, after they had taken possession of Staten Island, in July, 1776, one hundred years ago to-day, that part of Northfield bordering upon Fresh Kill was assigned to the Queen's Rangers, a regiment of tories from Long, Staten, and Manhattan Islands, and a few from New Jersey, commanded by the notorious Lieut. Col. John Graves Simcoe. A fortification was erected on the eminence just west of St. Andrew's Church, which was considered a very important military position, because it commanded the approach to the very centre of the Island through Fresh Kill.

On the 8th of August, 1777, a party of Americans crossed from New Jersey to Staten Island, landing somewhere on the shore near the Mill Creek, and directed their course through Northfield towards Richmond. They were met not far from that village by a detachment of British soldiers, who, after a brief struggle, retreated, and sought shelter within the stone walls of St. Andrew's Church. The Americans surrounded the church, firing through the windows until every pane of glass in the building was broken. By this time the British had received reinforcements from the vicinity of Tompkinsville, and it then became the turn of the Americans to retreat, which they did by the Fresh Kill road through Westfield, and finally reached New Jersey by seizing boats along the Sound, having lost several men, but having also killed the British Colonel in command of the pursuing party.

The winter of 1779 was exceedingly severe; the snow was deep, and the Kills and Sound were frozen over. A detachment of Americans, under Lord Stirling, taking advantage of the ice,

crossed the Sound at Elizabethport for the purpose of surprising "Skinner's New Corps," stationed on Staten Island. After landing at Hollands' Hook, they marched along the shore, and the advance party, it is said, had reached the Mill road, but found the snow so deep, they could advance no further in that direction. They accordingly retraced their steps, and when they had reached the junction of the Shore and Church roads, a superior British force met them, and a smart skirmish ensued on the ground now occupied by the Griffith, Van Pelt & Greenwald stores, and the buildings in the vicinity. The Americans were compelled to retreat, which they did with small loss.

During the whole war, the Pralls and other families residing near "The Lines," as the vicinity of the Sound was called, suffered greatly from the depredations of the Jerseymen on their property, who regarded all who continued to live on Staten Island as tories, while the British looked upon them as half-fledged whigs.

All intercourse between the people of Staten Island and New Jersey was prohibited by the British authorities, and during the seasons when the Kills and Sound were navigable, one or more gun-boats were kept plying to and fro, to enforce the prohibition. These gun-boats were maintained by the people of the county, who were taxed to pay their expenses. When the waters were frozen, patrols were stationed along the shores to prevent communication.

Since the formation of the federal government, the town of Northfield has sent two Representatives to Congress in the persons of Henry Crocheron and Jacob Crocheron. Of the County Judges, Daniel Lake and Richard Merrill, before, and Gozen Ryers and John J. Murray, after, the formation of the present government. There have been eight Presidential electors from our county, two of whom, Jacob Crocheron and John T. Harrison, came from Northfield. Of the Members of Assembly, Northfield has furnished the following : Joshua Mersereau, grandson of the widow, eight times ; Cornelius Corsen, once ; Gozen Ryers, four times ; Lewis Ryers, three times ; Richard Corsen, three times ; Jacob Mersereau, twice ; Paul Mersereau, once ; Lawrence Hillyer, twice ; Peter Mersereau, once ; Nicholas Crocheron, once ; Joshua Mersereau, Jun., once ; Thomas Child,

once ; Nathaniel J. Wyeth, once ; John Decker, four times ; John B. Hillyer, once. In 1788, Gozen Ryers was sent to the State Constitutional Convention. Of the County Clerks, Thomas Carhart, Adam Mott, Daniel Corsen, John Mersereau, Joshua Mersereau, Jun , Israel C. Denyse, (twice) came from Northfield. Since 1818, when the office of District Attorney was made a county office, there have been thirteen incumbents, of whom five either resided or had their offices, in Northfield, viz : Lot C. Clark, George White, Alfred DeGroot, Sidney F. Rawson, and John Croak, the present incumbent.

Of the sheriffs of the county, the following came from Northfield, viz. : Thomas Stillwell, twice ; John Depue, twice ; Christian Corsen, John Hillyer, three times ; another of the same name, once ; Lewis Ryers, Benjamin Parker, Jacob Crocheron, three times ; Jacob Hillyer, Lawrence Hillyer, Andrew B. Decker and Jacob Simonson.

During the last century, this locality has been known by a variety of names. One hundred years ago, Rivington's *Royal Gazette*, published in New York, announced the fact that a ferry had been established between Staten Island and Bergen Point, but does not inform us who was the proprietor ; probably it was Gozen Ryers, who, several years before the close of the last century, was the proprietor of a ferry not only to Bergen Point, but to New York. The boats used on the latter were the old-fashioned pirogues, or periauguas, which had certain hours for starting, but very uncertain hours for arriving, which might be the same day or the next, as winds, tides, or other circumstances permitted. The locality was then known as Ryers' ferry. These boats started from the old wharf at the foot of the Church road. There was an opposition ferry in those days, too, which was started by John Hilleker, from a wharf just east of Jewett's lead works, the remains of which may still be seen. Early in the present century, the late David Mersereau, Esq., became the owner of both these ferries, and the village received the name of Mersereau's ferry, which it retained for many years. As it grew in proportions, and the business, and, we may add, the self-esteem of the inhabitants increased, efforts were made to bestow upon it a more euphonious appellation ; meetings were held, and several names were proposed, among which were Irvington, New Bristol,

&c.; but by some means the preposterous name of Cityville became attached to the place, and if memory serves, even the post-office was called by that name. At length, the absurdity of the name began to be more and more apparent, and another meeting was held, the result of which was, that at the suggestion of the Rev. Dr. Brownlee, the present appropriate name of Port Richmond was adopted. As it is a part of the Rev. gentleman's professional duties to bestow names, it is not at all surprising that he should have become an adept, after more than forty years' practice.

I have the authority of the late Rev. Dr. Van Pelt, for thirty-three years pastor of the Reformed Church in this Village, for asserting that, in the old frame building which formerly stood on the site of the Greenwald stores, and universally known as "The Academy," the first Sunday School in the United States was organized. It was intended especially for the instruction of larger children and adults, who had not had the advantages of an education in their earlier years, and, in addition to a fitting religious culture, they were instructed in the ordinary fundamental branches of a common school education; and there are, no doubt, some still living, who are approximating, if they have not already reached their three-score and ten years, who were pupils in that school.

It is a matter worthy of remark, that in two of the churches of this Town, the pastorates have been of extraordinary length. In St. Andrew's Church the pastorate of the Rt. Rev. Richard Channing Moore commenced in October, 1788, and terminated in 1808, a period of twenty years; he was immediately succeeded by his son, the late Rev. Dr. David Moore, whose pastorate terminated with his life in 1856, a period of forty-eight years, making a total of sixty-eight years in the two succeeding pastorates of that church.

But the Reformed Church in this Village presents a more remarkable record. In 1802 the Rev. Dr. P. I. Van Pelt was installed as pastor, and continued in that office until 1835, a period of thirty-three years; in the latter year the present pastor, the Rev. Dr. Brownlee, was installed; his pastorate, next month, will reach its forty-first year; thus, the two pastorates of this church will embrace three-fourths of a century, within one year.

On the 24th of November, 1866, the Village of Port Richmond

was incorporated ; the division of the village into wards was not adopted, avoiding thereby the sectional jealousies and bickerings which so often disturb the harmony, and retard the prosperity of small communities. For several consecutive years the same trustees were reelected, and the present presiding officer of the Village is the first and only one it ever had.

On the 24th of July, 1835, the "Staten Island Banking Association" commenced business. The bank was located in this Village, in the west end of the double building at the corner of Broadway and the Shore road, now occupied as a shoe store. Its first Board of Directors were Richard D. Littell, John H. Smith, William A. Swain, Franklin S. Kinney, William Woram, William Colgate, Eder V. Haughwout, Jacob Bodine, John Totten, Sen., Joseph Seguire, John T. Harrison, and Samuel Sherwood. Richard D. Littell was President, and John West Cashier. After a brief existence of a few years, its doors were closed, and remain so to this day.

On the 14th day of September, 1836, in the northeast room of the second story of the Port Richmond (now Continental) Hotel, died Aaron Burr, the talented, ambitious, and unscrupulous statesman.

In a house still standing, a few rods from this spot, but some years since remodeled and modernized, on the 27th day of May, 1794, (eighty-two years ago,) was born a man, still living, and known all the world over for his sagacity, his indomitable energy, his probity, and the wonderful success of every enterprise undertaken by him. A man who has converted into gold whatever his magic hand has touched, until he counts his wealth by many millions, but who was never so devoted to Mammon as to forget that he was a son, a father, and a man : whose benefactions have been many, but entirely unostentatious, and were made by the thousands, the hundred thousand, and the million. This man, a son of Northfield, now lies upon his sick bed, and his hold on life gradually weakening, until, in all human judgment, no long time will elapse ere the ponderous doors of the costly granite mausoleum in the Cemetery of the Moravians will forever close upon the venerable form of Cornelius Vanderbilt.

The "Star-Spangled Banner" was then sung.

The Oration.

By Hon. GEORGE WM. CURTIS.

In introducing MR. CURTIS, Mr. Rawson said :

We have of late (referring to the political conventions for the nomination of President) heard and read a great deal about "favorite sons." The sons of many of them have happily set, but there are those who are always "favorite sons," and I feel honored in now having the privilege of introducing Staten Island's favorite son, the Honorable George William Curtis.

MR. CURTIS was received with great applause, and said :

Mr. President, fellow citizens, neighbors and friends :

On the 19th of April, 1775, when Samuel Adams, well called the father of the Revolution, heard the first shots of the British upon Lexington Green, he knew that war had at last begun, and full of enthusiasm, of hope, of trust in America, he exclaimed with rapture, "Oh! what a glorious morning." And there is no fellow citizen of ours, wherever he may be to-day—whether sailing the remotest seas or wandering among the highest Alps, however far removed, however long separated from his home, who, as his eyes open upon this glorious morning, does not repeat with the same fervor the words of Samuel Adams, and thank God with all his heart, that he too is an American. In imagination he sees infinitely multiplied the very scene that we behold. From every roof and gable, from every door and window of all the myriads of happy American homes from the seaboard to the mountains, and from the mountains still onward to the sea, the splendor of this summer heaven is reflected in the starry beauty of the American flag. From every steeple and tower in crowded cities and towns, from the village belfry, and the school-house and meeting-house on solitary country roads, ring out the joyous peals. From countless thousands of reverend lips ascends the voice of prayer. Everywhere the inspiring words of the great Declaration that we have heard, the charter of our Independence, the scripture of our liberty, is read aloud in eager, in grateful ears. And above all, and under all, pulsing through all the praise and prayer, from the frozen sea to the tropic gulf, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the great heart of a great people beats in

fullness of joy, beats with pious exultation, that here at last, upon our soil—here, by the wisdom of our fathers and the bravery of our brothers, is founded a Republic, vast, fraternal, peaceful, upon the divine corner-stone of liberty, justice and equal rights.

There have indeed been other republics, but they were founded upon other principles. There are republics in Switzerland to-day a thousand years old. But Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden are pure democracies not larger than the county in which we live, and wholly unlike our vast, national and representative republic. Athens was a republic, but Marathon and Salamis, battles whose names are melodious in the history of liberty, were won by slaves. Rome was a republic, but slavery degraded it to an empire. Venice, Genoa, Florence, were republican cities, but they were tyrants over subject neighbors, and slaves of aristocrats at home. There were republics in Holland, honorable forever, because from them we received our common schools, the bulwark of American liberty, but they too were republics of classes, not of the people. It was reserved for our fathers to build a republic upon a declaration of the equal rights of men ; to make the Government as broad as humanity ; to found political institutions upon faith in human nature. “The sacred rights of mankind,” fervently exclaimed Alexander Hamilton, “are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records ; they are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of Divinity itself.” That was the sublime faith in which this century began. The world stared and sneered—the difficulties and dangers were colossal. For more than eighty years that Declaration remained only a Declaration of faith. But, fellow citizens, fortunate beyond all men, our eyes behold its increasing fulfilment. The sublime faith of the fathers is more and more the familiar fact of the children. And the proud flag which floats over America to-day, as it is the bond of indissoluble union, so it is the seal of ever enlarging equality, and ever surer justice. Could the men of that earlier day, could Samuel Adams and all his associates have lived through this amazing century to see this glorious morning, as they counted these teeming and expanding States, as they watched the advance of republican empire from the Alleghanies through a country of golden plenty, passing the snowy

Sierras and descending to the western sea of peace, as they saw the little spark of political liberty which they painfully struck, blown by the eager breath of a century into a flame which aspires to heaven and illuminates the earth, they would bow their reverend heads at this moment, as Adams and Jefferson bowed theirs fifty years ago to-day; and the happy burden of their hearts would tremble from their expiring lips, "Now, oh Lord, let thy servants depart in peace, for their eyes have seen thy salvation."

But we have learned, by sharp experience, that prosperity is girt with peril. In this hour of exultation we will not scorn the wise voices of warning and censure, the friendly and patriotic voices of the time. We will not forget that the vital condition of national greatness and prosperity is the moral character of the people. It is not vast territory, a temperate climate, exhaustless mines, enormous wealth, amazing inventions, imperial enterprises, magnificent public works, a population miraculously multiplied: it is not busy shops and humming mills, and flaming forges, and commerce that girdles the globe with the glory of a flag, that makes a nation truly great. These are but opportunities. They are like the health and strength and talents of a man, which are not his character and manhood, but only the means of their development. The test of our national greatness is the use we make of our opportunities. If they breed extravagance, wild riot and license—if they make fraud plausible and corruption easy—if they confuse private morality, and debauch the public conscience, beware, beware! for all our prosperity is then but a Belshazzar's feast of splendor, and while we sit drunken with wine and crowned with flowers, the walls of our stately palace are flaming and cracking with the terrible words of our doom.

But with all faults confessed, and concessions made, with all dangers acknowledged and difficulties measured, I think we may truly say that, upon the whole, we have used our opportunities well. The commanding political fact of the century that ends to-day, is the transcendent force and the recuperative power of republican institutions. Neither the siren of prosperity, nor the red fury of civil war, has been able to destroy our Government or to weaken our faith in the principles upon which it is founded. We have been proud, and reckless, and defiant; we have sinned,

and have justly suffered, but I say, in your hearing, as, had I the voice, I would say in the hearing of the world to-day, that out of the fiery furnace of our afflictions, America emerges at this moment greater, better, truer, nobler, than ever in its history before.

I do not forget how much is due to the political genius of the race from which we are so largely sprung. Nine-tenths of the revolutionary population of the country was of English stock. The Declaration of Independence was a fruit of Magna Charta, and Magna Charta grew from seed planted before history in the German forest. Our friend, the historian of the island, in the interesting sketch of this town that he read us, tells us that Northfield was the most patriotic town in the county during the revolution, and that the original settlers were, in great part, of German stock. The two facts naturally go together. The instinct of individual liberty and independence is the germ of the political developement of that race from which also our fathers sprang. They came from England to plant, as they believed, a purer England. Their new England was to be a true England. At last they took up arms reluctantly to defend England against herself, to maintain the principles and traditions of English liberty. The farmers of Bunker Hill were the Barons of Runnymede in a later day, and the victory at Yorktown was not the seal of a revolution so much as the pledge of continuing English progress. This day dawns upon a common perception of that truth on both sides of the ocean. In no generous heart on either shore lingers any trace of jealousy or hostility. It is a day of peace, of joy, of friendship. Here above my head, and in your presence, side by side with our own flag, hangs the tri-color of France, our earliest friend, and the famous cross of England, our ally in civilization. May our rivalry in all true progress be as inspiring as our kinship is close! In the history of the century, I claim that we have done our share. In real service to humanity, in the diffusion of intelligence, and the lightening of the burden of labor, in beneficent inventions,—yes, in the education of the public conscience, and the growth of political morality, of which this very day sees the happy signs, I claim that the act of this day a hundred years ago is justified, and that we have done not less, as an Independent State, than our venerable mother England.

Think what the country was that hundred years ago. To-day the State of which we are citizens contains a larger population than that of all the States of the Union when Washington was President. Yet, New York is now but one of thirty-eight States, for to-day our youngest sister, Colorado, steps into the national family of the Union. The country of a century ago was our father's small estate. That of to-day is our noble heritage. Fidelity to the spirit and principles of our fathers will enable us to deliver it enlarged, beautified, ennobled, to our children of the new century. Unwavering faith in the absolute supremacy of the moral law; the clear perception that well-considered, thoroughly-proved, and jealously-guarded institutions, are the chief security of liberty; and an unswerving loyalty to ideas, made the men of the Revolution, and secured American independence. The same faith and the same loyalty will preserve that independence, and secure progressive liberty forever. And here and now, upon this sacred centennial altar, let us, at least, swear that we will try public and private men by precisely the same moral standard, and that no man who directly or indirectly connives at corruption or coercion to acquire office or to retain it, or who prostitutes any opportunity or position of public service to his own or another's advantage, shall have our countenance or our vote. The one thing that no man in this country is so poor that he cannot own is his vote; and not only is he bound to use it honestly, but intelligently. Good government does not come of itself; it is the result of the skilful co-operation of good and shrewd men. If they will not combine, bad men will; and if they sleep, the devil will sow tares. And as we pledge ourselves to our fathers' fidelity, we may well believe that in this hushed hour of noon, their gracious spirits bend over us in benediction. In this sweet summer air, in the strong breath of the ocean that beats upon our southern shore; in the cool winds that blow over the Island from the northern hills; in these young faces and the songs of liberty that murmur from their lips; in the electric sympathy that binds all our hearts with each other, and with those of our brothers and sisters throughout the land, lifting our beloved country as a sacrifice to God, I see, I feel, the presence of our fathers: the blithe heroism of Warren, and the unsullied youth of Quincy: the fiery impulse of Otis and Patrick Henry: the serene wisdom of John Jay and

the comprehensive grasp of Hamilton: the sturdy and invigorating force of John and of Samuel Adams ;—and at last, embracing them all, as our eyes at this moment behold cloud and hill, and roof and tree, and field and river, blent in one perfect picture, so combining and subordinating all the great powers of his great associates, I feel the glory of the presence, I bend my head to the blessing of the ever-living, the immortal Washington.

“My Country, 'tis of Thee,” was then sung, followed by the Doxology, “Praise God,” &c.

The Rev. S. G. SMITH then dismissed the audience with the following benediction :

May the blessing of our father's God now rest upon us. As in time past, so in time to come, may He guard and defend our land. May He crown the coming years with peace and prosperity. May He ever clothe our rulers with righteousness, and give us a future characterized by purity of life and integrity of purpose. May He everywhere shed forth the benign influence of His spirit, and to the present and coming generations vouchsafe the inspiring hopes of His gospel, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.





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