

CATHARYNA
BRETT

Portrait of a Colonial
Businesswoman

by
Henry Cassidy



ERRATA

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

- P. 23, line 20 read: "wit", not "with".
P. 29, line 28 the symbol for the English pound.
P. 50, line 9 read: "build", not "building".
P. 53, line 4 read: "United States".
line 18 Helen Wilkinson Reynolds' quote, read "...people of Dutch...".
P. 69, line 20 read: "United States".
P. 70, line 18 comma was omitted following "wilderness".
P.104, line 6 first word, read: "She".
P.107, line 4 read: "Fishkill".
Pp.109-119 read: the symbol for the English pound instead of "&" following "Consider'n" in the Deeds.
P 124, Endnote 16. read: symbol for the English pound instead of "&".
P.126, fifth entry, read: *Journal of Jasper Danckaerts 1679-1680.*

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Volume 77, 1992

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The Dutchess County Historical Society encourages accuracy but does not assume responsibility for statements of fact or opinion by the author. The author's use of terminology represents the vernacular of an earlier era in our society.

Some editing has been done to the original manuscript to maintain the flow of Catharyna Brett's story but the author's additional material has been included in the endnotes.

Final publication decisions were those of the Publication Committee of the Dutchess County Historical Society.

The Dutchess Country Historical society was organized in 1914 to preserve and share the county's history and tradition. The only county-wide organization of its kind, the Society is the active leader and promoter of local history in Dutchess County. Principal endeavors include the publishing of historical works and the collecting and safekeeping of manuscripts, artifacts and other priceless treasures from the past. The Society has also been instrumental in the preservation of two pre-Revolutionary landmarks, the Clinton House and the Glebe House, both in Poughkeepsie.

The Society offers its members a variety of activities and special events throughout the year.

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A DEDICATION

Henry Cassidy served as East Fishkill Historian until his death in 1988 after a lengthy struggle with cancer. An East Fishkill resident since 1951, his initial appointment by Supervisor Allyn Way came in 1980. He was reappointed on the basis of his exceptional work on behalf of the town by Wesley Virtue. His professional legacy includes restored cemeteries, including the unique Storm family slave cemetery, historic markers, important research on archaeological sites in the East Fishkill area, the Rombout Patent, the United States Constitution, the beginnings of government in New York State and numerous papers, articles, and monographs.

He called me "boss". I considered it both a compliment and a challenge. He took it quite seriously, and within a few short months of our first meeting in the fall of 1981, he had made himself available and indispensable to my office. I quickly came to depend upon Henry for carefully researched, accurate, speedily completed assignments; the text for a poster series for the County Tercentenary, editing of a book, community history information, presentations for conferences, help with research projects. I also came to depend upon his wisdom and honesty. This was a modest man with a healthy ego, in that he knew who he was and the extent of his considerable capabilities. He had little patience with incompetence and laziness. He was proud to be a town historian, loved his chosen community and enjoyed being of service. He was devoted to his family, doting on the accomplishments of his witty and talented wife Martha, a painter, his brilliant daughter, Constance, a scholar, and his beautiful granddaughter, Andrea.

He was an old-fashioned "tire-kicker" who fit in as easily into small town life as he did into the electric atmosphere of the Anglo-American Press Club, which he served for a time as president.

This friendly, quiet, remarkable man, who spoke four languages fluently, was a graduate of Harvard. He was a crack journalist, who was a foreign correspondent in the Paris office of the Associated Press, saw the Spanish Civil War first hand, survived the trenches of the Maginot Line and the fall of France, became chief of bureau for the Associated Press in Moscow, corresponded with Josef Stalin and reported the second front in Russia during World War II. After the war, he became European director of NBC. His was the radio voice that commented on important national and international events in the early days of NBC's "Today Show." As a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor on the strength of his work in fostering international understanding, he was treated by a grateful French nation with the respect reserved for members of the diplomatic corps. He was without peer as a reporter, editor, writer and manager of news. He knew the difference between journalism and history because he had been deeply involved with both.

The story of Catharyna Brett's life and world was a work of his retirement years. It had started as an idea for a novel, but Henry soon came to see that it should be written as history. Having made that decision, he resisted the temptation to dramatize the story with personal fantasy to please a popular audience. He spent winters in New York City exploring court records and the considerable archival resources available

there to support the secondary sources and traditions unearthed in southern Dutchess. The finished manuscript was set aside when he found his publishers primarily interested in fantasy, not truth.

After his death, Martha brought the document to me, to determine how this last important work could be given proper visibility. While circumstances made it difficult for my office to publish the manuscript, we found allies in the leadership of the Dutchess County Historical Society. The story of a courageous, significant, but heretofore little known figure in New York history is finally about to be shared. It has taken several years of diligent effort on the part of Dutchess County Historical Society Publications Committee volunteers and staff, sensitive editing by another journalist/historian, Willa Skinner, and the patient support and advice of Martha and Constance.

Henry's death was a loss to the community. As his friend and colleague it was a personal loss as well. Writing this book was Henry's final legacy to his community. Publishing it is our way of thanking him and his family.

Although it may seem an unusual thing to do, those of us who have worked to bring about this publication dedicate it....to the author and his wife.

Thank you, Henry and Martha.

Joyce C. Ghee, Dutchess County Historian
June 5, 1991

PREFACE

In his biography of Catharyna Brett, Henry Cassidy tells the story of a woman who left her mark on Colonial history.

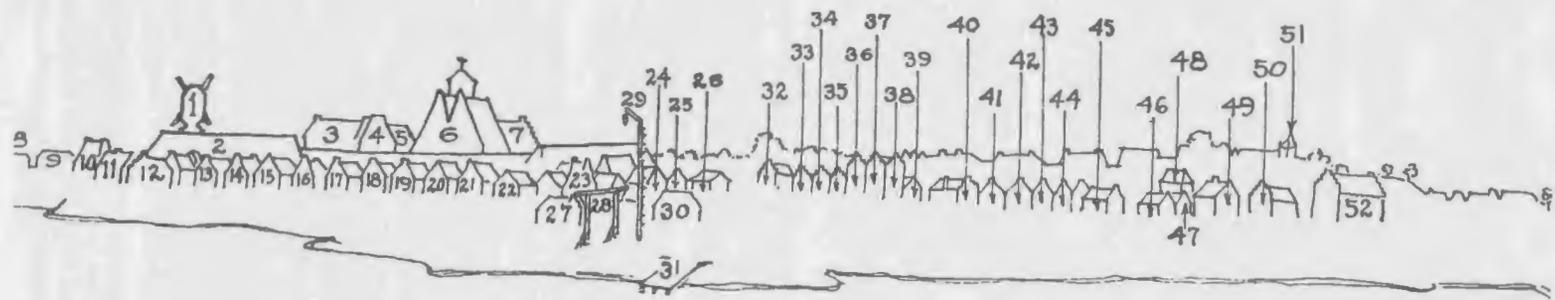
Tradition calls her Madam Brett, but as historian Henry Noble MacCracken points out in "Old Dutchess Forever", she never used the title herself. She came to be called Madam by succeeding generations. One early document refers to her as Madam Brett, but her contemporaries called her Mistress Brett. After two centuries or more, however, she is known as Madam Brett, a leader in a world of pioneering men, respected by all.

When the Hudson River claimed the life of her husband, Roger Brett, she rose to the challenge of facing life in the wilderness. Unlike the Dutch patroons on neighboring estates who kept their manors intact and rented to tenants, Catharyna sold her land outright, encouraging permanent settlement and the growth of southern Dutchess County. MacCracken said of her, "All her life was one of mastery, mastery of the wilderness as of all other conditions."

Family legends told of how she could be seen any day astride her horse on her round of visits to her farms. She was generous and fair-minded and expert in her understanding of the Indians, whom she regarded as her friends.

Her name heads the list of shareholders in the Frankfort Storehouse, an adventure in cooperative enterprises, established in 1743. Her mill at the mouth of Fishkill Creek was so important to early settlers that it was commonly said, "All roads lead to Madam Brett's mill."

Willa Skinner
Editor



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CHAPTER ONE

By way of introduction, if it could be done simply, with no suspicion of pomposity or pretense, it would be proper to say that Catharyna Brett, a Colonial dame, living with her children in the woods of Dutchess County, New York, personified the origins of the mightiest nation ever known to man. Her father was a Walloon, her mother Dutch, her husband English and her descendants thoroughly American. Her sons grew up in the woods, playing with Indians. One of her grandsons was a notorious drunkard in the neighborhood of George Washington's headquarters until he reformed and turned into a sanctimonious teetotaler. The life of Catharyna Brett became a legend. Her home became a museum.

The first settlers of New York were thirty-two Walloon families, French-speaking Protestants who fled from Belgium to Holland to escape the Spanish Inquisition and sailed to Manhattan in 1623 aboard the *Nieu Nederlandt*, in the service of the Dutch West India Company. They came only three years after the Pilgrims founded Plymouth, Massachusetts, but the Walloons failed to achieve the fame of the English Puritans. Unlike the Pilgrims who stepped from the *Mayflower* onto a rock and immediately started writing their memoirs, the Walloons waded ashore and never kept diaries. Not only did the Walloons lack the literacy of the Pilgrims, but they were singularly unromantic. Instead of building picturesque wooden houses surrounded by stockades and setting a distinct lifestyle as the Pilgrims did, the Walloons dug holes and lived in the ground like animals. Rather than make compacts among themselves and organize a government, the Walloons dispersed, only a few remaining on Manhattan. No New Yorker ever boasted that his ancestors came over on the *Nieu Nederlandt*. No tourist ever visited the place where the Walloons landed.

Catharyna Brett's father, Francis Rombout, first came to America in 1653, the year that the colony on Manhattan was incorporated by the Dutch as the City of New Amsterdam. A boy of 18, he arrived as supercargo, clerk in charge of freight on the ship *New Amsterdam*. He liked the looks of the colony, went home to collect his personal belongings and came back to stay. Entering the fur trade, he became one of the new world's first self-made men, and eventually mayor of New York. He purchased 85,000 acres of land from the Indians in Dutchess County on the east bank of the Hudson River sixty miles north of New York, for which he paid the equivalent of \$1,250, a fair price compared to the \$24 that another Walloon, Pierre Minuit, paid for Manhattan. Rombout obtained a British Crown patent for his tract in 1685, a title that was still valid three centuries later when the land was worth thousands of dollars an acre. Married three times and a widower twice, he left his land to his only living child, Catharyna, the future Madam Brett, when she was four years old.

Her mother, Helena Teller Rombout, was the daughter of William Teller, a Dutch pioneer among the Indians and patriarch of an enormous Hudson Valley family. Teller went 150 miles up the Hudson to Fort Orange, Dutch frontier post for trade with the Indians. He settled at Schenectady, and was purported to have attended every Indian powwow and treaty-making ceremonial fire in the Albany area for half a century. Helena was married to Cornelius Bogardus and then to Jan Hendrickson Van Ball, members of prominent families in New Amsterdam, by whom she had seven children.

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After the deaths of two husbands, she married Rombout, it being the custom not to remain single for long in the primitive colony. She bore three children to him, of whom only Catharyna survived. The mother divided her considerable estate into seven parts, one for each of her older children. To Catharyna, she left only nine pence. Provision had already been made for the future Madam Brett by her father.

Her husband, Roger Brett, was a young officer of the British Navy and close friend of Lord Cornbury, then governor of New York. Cornbury was an eccentric who promenaded in a dress because he fancied a resemblance to his first cousin, Queen Anne. Cornbury was denounced by the colonists as a tyrant, traitor, imbecile, coward, bigot and crook, mostly because he tried to make them pay his salary. In his relations with the Bretts, he was a perfect gentleman, taking the time to relay their mail and send his regards to them after they moved up the river. But the Queen finally found it necessary to remove Cornbury. The colonists carried him off to debtors' prison, holding him until news came that his father, the Earl of Clarendon, had died, leaving an estate large enough to pay his bills. Cornbury returned to London and took his seat in the House of Lords. Brett, a serious young man, quite poor and ambitious to make his way in the New World, stayed in the colony. He married Catharyna Rombout when she was sixteen. Short of cash, he took her up the river to her inheritance.

Catharyna must have been a most attractive young lady to win the attention of the socialite lieutenant. But among all the mementoes that were left of her life and work — personal belongings, business papers and letters — there was no picture. Photography was not invented for another century, and she was not the type to have her portrait done in oil by a fashionable painter. It never occurred to any of her contemporaries to describe her appearance.

Catharyna must have been small. Most Walloons of that period possessed the same proportions as Napoleon. Her writing, like her father's, was the cramped scribble of a tiny hand. But she must also have acquired some of the buxomness of old Holland, being raised after her father's death in an entirely Dutch house amid the bevy of Dutch half-sisters and half-brothers.

She grew up to be a highly active woman. Family legend told of her riding her fields on horseback, wearing a flaming red cape. She dared to confront land grabbers and drunken Indians. In New York, she was the respected friend of the governor and of the governor's daughter. In Dutchess County, she became a business woman, the nation's first woman real estate dealer at a time when woman's place was strictly in the home.

Catharyna Brett sold her land to settlers. But the plots were often measured in the thousands of acres. She drove shrewd bargains. But after making a sale, usually reserving mineral rights on the land, she would add to the deed the pious hope that the purchaser "may at all times hereafter freely and quietly possess, enjoy and keep the said tract."

The Bretts also built a grist mill and operated a sloop on the Hudson between New York and their landing at the mouth of Fishkill Creek. The sloop was so much a part of their lives that one of their sons was born on board. He was named Rivery.

But the sloop took the life of Roger Brett. He was knocked overboard by the boom, in a sudden squall typical of the Hudson Valley, and drowned in the summer of 1718. Catharyna was left at the age of thirty-one with the eternal problems of a young widow and more than the customary difficulties.

She had three sons still alive, the oldest, eleven; a new house, still far from

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completion; her nearest relatives, half-brothers and half-sisters, sixty miles away by the river, and farther through the forests. And she had a huge debt.

To finance their move up the river, she and her husband had taken a large mortgage on her land from George Clarke, and even the interest had not been paid. Clarke was the distinguished secretary of the province, a distant relative of Lord Cornbury and a friend of the Brett family. He was also a land speculator, secretly one of the Upper Nine Partners in a patent to the north of Madam Brett's.

Eventually, she cleared up the debt by cutting Clarke in on the sale of several farms. It might have been easier for her to move back to New York. Still a young woman, she would not have lacked for suitors in the blossoming Colonial port town, where men far outnumbered women and remarriage was the rule. But Madam Brett never married again and she never gave up her home. There, in the woods, she brought up her boys and kept up her business.

In addition to handling the land, the sloop and the mill, she headed a warehouse company with twenty-one men partners. She sold off almost her entire estate of some 85,000 acres, colonizing much of Dutchess County. She dealt fairly and firmly with settlers, lawyers, surveyors, Crown functionaries, Indians and slaves.

Apart from business, she was a loving mother and a loyal friend. She wrote numerous letters to county people, sending her "Kind Respacks" and "thancks for your Favours." She dispensed medical advice to the ladies, prescribing drops for their "vapours," and advising them how to keep a "naterell body." To the men, she sent precise information on business affairs to make sure that they did not "Dessagrie."

Toward the end of a long, fruitful life, she made her most celebrated public appearance on Wednesday, June 5, 1760, at the age of 73. It was hardly her most significant act, and it was not her final appearance. For four years more, almost to the moment of her death, she was still going out to call on neighbors and meet business associates. In 1760 she went to a June wedding.

Her appearance was recorded by a chronicler ¹ of the time. Generation after generation told the story of the old lady in the black wooden coach drawn by four horses, riding majestically from her manor house at Fishkill Landing up the King's Road to Poughkeepsie to attend the marriage of Rebekah Schants and the Rev. Jacobus Van Nist.

Upon the open front seat of the coach rode two black coachmen, their stovepipe hats stretching to the sky. One man held the reins, the other the whip. High in the rear stood the liveried coach boy. Inside, regally erect, sat Madam Brett.

At her side was the Rev. Gualterius du Bois, husband of her half-sister Helena and pastor of the Middle Dutch Church in New York. Invited to perform the wedding service, he had traveled up to Fishkill Landing by stagecoach and joined Madam Brett to ride the rest of the way to Poughkeepsie. He wore a long black coat, black vest and stiff white shirt, with a bright white scarf tied around his neck and tucked into his high collar.

Facing them from the front seat of the coach were two of Madam Brett's grandsons, smart in their dark green, knee-length fitted coats with red vests and white shirts, the sleeves flaring out at the wrists.

One of the boys was her favorite grandchild, Robert Brett, eight and a half years old, the favorite because he was the youngest, and, although she could not have known then to what extent, he was one of those weak persons who always need help and win sympathy. Robert would become a roaring drunkard during the Continental Army's

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occupation of Fishkill in 1778.²

In 1760, young Robert had only to fear a correction from his grandmother if he failed to sit up straight or fooled too much with his cousin, while Madam Brett talked softly with the Dominie³ in the back of the coach.

There was much to discuss. She had some misgivings about the wedding – suspicions of the bride and a twinge of jealousy over the bridegroom – which she could explain to Mr. du Bois. And she was interested in the news of New York, which she never visited any more. The news of the city was good. The wars were over – the fight with the French and Indians in America and the Seven Years' War with the French and Spanish in Europe. The British were the impoverished victors. Now they were preparing to recoup their fortunes by taxing the colonists and that would bring a new conflict called Revolution. But now, there was peace.

The clever James de Lancey was lieutenant governor and acting governor of the province. There was much in common between him and Madam Brett. His father was a Huguenot, a Protestant fugitive from the Catholicism of France as her father had been from Flanders. His mother, a van Cortlandt, was Dutch, as was Madam Brett's. An earlier van Cortlandt, Stephanus, had been a partner of Madam Brett's father.

Madam Brett did not know de Lancey well. He was fifteen years younger, just a boy when she moved up the river. He had gone to England to complete his education at Cambridge.

But Madam Brett knew of his career as a young lawyer, member of the Governor's Council, chief justice of the province and now lieutenant governor. She would admire his skill in serving the Crown loyally, but still, as a native New Yorker, sympathizing with the complaints of the colonists. She would share his opinion that the Crown should not try to extract permanent, unlimited appropriations from the province, but should settle for annual grants from the Assembly to support the governor.⁴

He was to be succeeded some weeks later by the man she called "Old Colden" – actually he was one year her junior – who served for many years, and she had good reason to be pleased with his position of power. Forty years before his death, he had come to Dutchess County as surveyor-general, to draw the boundary of Madam Brett's property. He was attacked by drunken Indians who still claimed the land, and who threatened to smash his compass. He called on Madam Brett for help, and she paid the Indians to let him proceed. He completed the survey with great difficulty. If any question ever arose about that land, he knew its rightful owner.

In those days, Madam Brett permitted the Indians to live on her land, free of obligation, although it was no longer legally theirs. They did not always realize that she was doing them a favor by letting them stay in the place where they were born. But they did understand that she was being kind to them, and they repaid her generally with loyalty and affection. She was pleased on occasion to testify to provincial authorities that the Indians "were friends to me." She praised their chief, whom she called "Old Nimham," as "an Honest Morral Creature as ever I knew for he was an Instrument to protect me for I was in Danger of my Life." Daniel Nimham, son and successor to "Old Nimham" as sachem, later a Revolutionary War hero, never surrendered his tribe's claim to Madam Brett's land, but he always treated her with great respect.

Madam Brett had more trouble with the white people of Poughkeepsie than with the red men of Fishkill. The city of Poughkeepsie bordered on her father's patent to the north and west with indistinct boundaries of uncertain origin and the people there

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were foreign to her. They permitted blacks to share quarters with whites and to mingle with Indians, a practice which was frowned upon by provincial authorities and was considered dangerous, although there were only about 400 Indians and a similar number of blacks left in the county. In Madam Brett's house, the slaves were treated well, but they lived apart from the family, in the attic.

Poughkeepsie was a place of land grabbers and lawyers. Madam Brett rarely needed the services of the lawyers, so correct was the title to her property and so meticulous her paper work. But she did have occasion to complain that "I met with a Vast Deal of trouble by some white people at Pughkeepsie," and that "Pughkeepsie people" were intruding on her land and trying to sell it. On one occasion, she wrote, "I endeavoured to convince them in a Kind Manner but there was no Convincing of them," and eventually, "I was Advised to Aject two of the white people."

But she went among the people of Poughkeepsie in 1760 because the wedding, about to take place there, meant at least as much to her as it did to them. The bridegroom, Mr. Van Nist, was as much her pastor as theirs. For three years, he had served the two Dutch Reformed parishes of Poughkeepsie and Fishkill, preaching in each church on alternate Sundays. Although he had chosen his bride, Miss Schants, from Poughkeepsie, he had as many friends in Fishkill, and none more devoted than Madam Brett.

Madam Brett did not admire the match, but she prepared carefully for the wedding. She sent ahead a side of beef and a leg of mutton as her contribution to the supper. She had the waxed wooden sides of her big black coach polished to a bright shine. The four horses were groomed meticulously. The coachmen in front and the boy in the rear sat up smartly. Inside, with du Bois and her two grandchildren, Madam Brett looked like the matriarch of a family group, painted by an old Flemish master.

It was as though she realized that this was the way she would be remembered for generations to come and she wanted to make a fine, final impression on the Fishkill people, her good friends; on the Poughkeepsie people, her sometime enemies; on the landlords and freeholders and tenants; on slaves and Indians; on the Dutch, Flemish, English, Scots and Irish.

From her manor house, the coach rolled down to the King's Highway and turned north, swaying gently in the dirt ruts like a ship in a swelling sea. The houses of Fishkill were soon behind them and the coach rumbled through the woods, up and down the steep hills.

Rising to the crests, there was a wide view of the cleared fields and the humps of round blue mountains along the river to the west. Going down through the trees, the coach was brushed by branches of maple and pine and birch. The road climbed finally a long slope to a high plateau. Now, the mountains were behind them and the horizon was far away and flat, and before them, on the stony land, stood Poughkeepsie.

Down by the river stood the shafts of a grist mill, as tall as the Brett mill. Straight ahead, where Main Street crossed the King's Highway, the church spire, topped by a metal rooster weather vane, soared above a cloud of dust stirred by the gathering crowd.

From all over the county, they came for the wedding, the feast and the fun. In coaches and carriages, on carts and on foot, they converged on the Schants' lawn. Young men pranced up on horseback, their girls on the pillions behind them. Their parents rode up in lumber wagons with kitchen chairs for seats. The slaves squatted on straw in the rear of the wagons.

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Boys, white and black, climbed trees to watch from the branches. Their elders stood on the housetops. Faces were framed in the windows of the Schants' house and barn. The street and the lawn were filled with the excited crowd.

Madam Brett's arrival caused a momentary hush. Smaller vehicles made way and the people fell quiet as her coach turned majestically from the King's Highway into Main Street and stopped in front of the Schants' house. The coach boy jumped to the ground and opened the door. Madam Brett stepped out, and there was a murmur of awe and admiration.

Paul Schants hurried out to greet her and escorted her across the lawn to a cluster of chairs, set up in front of a small platform. Madam Brett took the place of honor in the center of the first row.

Over the platform was stretched a banner bearing the Dutch coat of arms. At both sides of the platform were other banners, inscribed "Fishkill" and "Poughkeepsie."

On the Fishkill banner was a picture of the infant Jesus in his manger, under the star of Bethlehem, with the words: "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." The Poughkeepsie banner portrayed Moses on the Mount, and proclaimed: "And the glory of the Lord shone upon Mount Sinaia, and the cloud covered it six days, and the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud."

The crowd settled on the chairs and on the lawn, and Dominie du Bois strode to the platform. The young couple stepped before him. Rebekah, tall, slender and graceful, her auburn hair falling in curls to her shoulders, wore a long white dress and carried a small bouquet of field flowers. Van Nist was dressed in a black jacket and knee breeches with silver buckles at the knee.

At that moment, seeing them standing there, simple and sweet, Catharyna Brett must have approved of the marriage. Dominie du Bois read the Dutch wedding service aloud and pronounced the young couple man and wife.

The people then rose from their seats and crowded around the platform and demanded that the Dominie judge who had produced the better banner, Fishkill or Poughkeepsie. He demurred politely at first, but they insisted, especially the ladies, and finally he yielded. With a glance toward Madam Brett, he said that if he had to make a choice, he would select the banner of Fishkill. His judgment brought shouts of glee from the people of Fishkill and moans of mock despair from Poughkeepsie.

Then, it was time for the feast. The men brought sawhorses out on the lawn, placed planks across them and put chairs around them. From the Schants kitchen, a dozen black girls carried platters of beef and mutton and turkey and chicken, cooked on spits in the fireplace. There were bowls of vegetables, and plates of cakes and cookies and pies and puddings, done in the great oven.

The people of Fishkill ate at the first sitting, because they had the long ride, a dozen miles or more to their homes after dinner. They put their banner in the middle of the table. The bride and groom sat in the center seats, opposite each other. Madam Brett was seated beside the bride, Dominie du Bois beside the groom.

When the Fishkill people had finished their meal, they picked up their banner and left, and the Poughkeepsie people took their places. The newlyweds and Madam Brett and Dominie Du Bois stayed through the second sitting, eating again, as much as they could.

At the end of the day, Paul Schants insisted that Madam Brett spend the night at his house before making the tiring trip back to Fishkill. There was room for her -- the room vacated by Rebekah.

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That night, the grocer's home was Madam Brett's palace. The girl's bedroom was her royal chamber. The echoes of the shouts of the crowd were her acclamation. She could be content with the respect and affection of these people.

The next morning, starting for home, Madam Brett left twenty guilders for Rebekah to buy new furniture for the parsonage – a purchase Rebekah would never make.

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CHAPTER TWO

There were many pressures – religious, political, financial and personal – that might compel a young man to emigrate from Europe to America in the mid-seventeenth century. Catharyna Brett's father, Francois Rombout, was exposed to all of them.

He was an ambitious youth of twenty-two with a good grammar school education but he had problems. He was a Walloon, as the French-speaking people of the Lowlands were called, living in an area where Flemish, a Dutch dialect, was spoken. The majority of the townspeople were Catholic, while he was Protestant; moreover, the district was in the grip of an economic depression. He escaped these predicaments by sailing to America in 1653. In so doing, he leaped in a single bound from the Middle Ages and the Holy Roman Empire through the dawning modernity of the Dutch Republic into the New World.

Some of the Pilgrims passed through the same part of Europe as Rombout, and for motives similar to his, before proceeding to America. About thirty-five members of the English Separatist Church migrated first in 1610 to Lleyden, Holland, seeking religious asylum. But they also encountered hard times and moved on.⁵

While the Pilgrims first sought asylum among the Dutch, the Walloons first sought refuge among the English. A group of them petitioned the British embassy at The Hague in July, 1621, for permission to establish a colony in Virginia. But on receiving no answer, they turned to the government of The Netherlands, the States-General.

Their timing was perfect. The Dutch, after voyages of discovery and exploration, were well aware of the necessity to colonize the new lands for commercial purposes as well as for a restraint against Spanish and French imperialism. On July 1, 1621, the States-General had given the West India Company a monopoly of trade in New Netherland, and in August 1622, the West India Company promptly accepted the application of the Walloons to emigrate to New Netherlands. The company provided a ship, *Nieu Nederlandt*, of 260 tons, (eighty more than the *Mayflower*) on which thirty-two Walloons sailed from Amsterdam, Holland, and reached New Netherland in April 1624, giving birth to the colony.

Their ship was under command of Captain Cornelis May. The names of only two passengers were recorded for history -- Joris Jansen Rapelye, a Walloon, and his wife, Catelina Trico, described as a Parisian. Their names were recorded because they became the parents on June 9, 1625, of Sarah Rapelye, the first white child born in New Netherland.

The Walloons, in payment for their passage, had promised to live for at least six years where they were assigned by the West India Company. They contracted to sell their produce only to the company, and they accepted a holy mission to convert the heathen Indians to Christianity.

The largest group of settlers sailed 150 miles up the Hudson River to establish Fort Orange, later to be known as Albany, where the principal contact was made with the Indians for the fur trade. Only about eight persons, most of them men, stayed on Manhattan.⁶ Thirty years after the first Walloons landed in New Netherland, Francis Rombout came to the colony in 1653. His native town of Hasselt,⁷ now capital of the

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Belgian province of Limburg, was then a town in the independent principality of Liege', ruled by a prince-bishop of the Holy Roman Empire.

In later years, Liege knew many masters -- French in 1795, Dutch in 1815, Belgian after 1831. But in Rombout's time, the diocese was its own master in the name of the Catholic church, one of the medieval states of a fragmented Europe where the religious, political, and dynastic strife of the Thirty Years War was just subsiding. It was no place for a restless young Protestant.

Rombout and a young friend, Jan Visser, inspired by some of these feelings, made their way to the Netherlands, and there through the offices of the Dutch West India Company, obtained passage on the *New Amsterdam*, owned by Adriaen Blommaert, a Manhattan burgher whose ship plied regularly between America and Holland. Rombout was taken on as freight manager. Visser served as a sailor.

A view of New Amsterdam, painted in a watercolor landscape by an unknown artist at about the time of Rombout's arrival, could still be seen, centuries later, in the Royal Archives of The Netherlands at The Hague.

Coming closer, Rombout could see a strip of raw earth along the shore, in front of a row of houses. From the center of the beach, a single wooden wharf extended a few feet into the water. Over the wharf, like a hangman's gallows, stood a crane with a rope dangling from its arm. The sight of it struck the first somber note, but a closer look revealed it to be the crane used to load and unload cargoes.

To the left rose the brown earthenwork walls of the fort, enclosing the barracks and the governor's house and, highest on the horizon, the blue tower of the church. To the right loomed the gray stone city hall, until recently a tavern. Beyond the fort stood a four-armed windmill. Behind the city hall was a square, squat brewery. Farther back were a few farmhouses called bouweries, hay piles and then the dense, green wilderness.



View of New Amsterdam about the time of Rombout's arrival in 1653.

1. The Wind-mill 2. The Fort 3. The Barracks 4. "Gevangen Huys" or Jail 5. Store-house or Officers' Quarters 6. The Church in the Fort 7. The Governor's House 8. Probably the house of Charles Morgan 9. Lot of Paulus Heymanssen 10. Probably the house of Sergeant Huybertsen 11. House of Jan Evertsen Bout 12. House of Lammerl Van Valekenborch 13. House Jurien Andriessen 14. Lot of Rem Jensen 15. Lot deeded by Van Naerden (Ruyter) to Paulus Schrick 16. House of Claes Jansen Van Naerden 17. Lot of Cornelis Teunissen (shoemaker) 18. Lot of Jan Jansen Schepmoes 19. Lot granted to Teunis Jansen Zycylmaker (Sail-maker) 20. Lot of Egbert Von Borsum 21. Lot of Maretie Jansen 22. Lot of Maretie Jansen 23. Possibly the house of Peter Ebell 24. Possibly the house of Cors Pietersen 25. Possibly the house of Jochim Pietersen Kuyter 26. Probably the stable of The Fort 27. Unidentified building 28. "Gallows" (more likely used in weighing and displaying merchandise) 29. The Crane 30. Once thought to be the Weigh-house, but more likely the house of Jan Pietersen 31. Wooden wharf erected by Peter Stuyvesant 1648-49 32. Probably the old Store-house of the West India Company 33. House of Hans Kierstede, Surgeon 34. House of Burger Jorissen or Cornelis van Steenwick 35. House of Pieter Cornelissen 36. Vander Griff's Store-house 37. West India Company Store-house 38. Augustine Herman's Store-house 39. House built by Thomas Hall or Jacob Haey 40. Old Church 41. House of Hendrick Jansen (De Boor) 42. Lot owned by Samuel Edsall (hatter) 43. Lot owned by Nicolaes Becker 44. No record of ownership 45. House of Hans Dreeper 46. & 47. Houses at the corner of Broad Street and the Strand, probably belonging to Jochem Pietersen Kuyter and Jacobus Schellingner 48. Perhaps the Brewery on Stone Street, owned by Govert Loockermans 49. House and Lot of Sybout Claessen 50. Lot of Adriaen Blommaert 51. Haystack in neighborhood of present Broadway and Wall Street 52. City Tavern, converted in 1653 into the "Staedt Huys" or City Hall

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Ashore, the scene was not so quaint. The houses were made of planks, rough-hewn from the forest, and crude tiles. The buildings were connected by crooked, unpaved, muddy paths. The earthworks of the fort were cracked. The ramparts served as grazing grounds for cattle and horses. Pigs rooted in the walls.

The people came from all over the western world – Dutch, Walloons, English, French, Italians, Swedes, Danes, and Africans. They spoke in eighteen languages, much of it seafarers' blasphemy. The Dutch and the Walloons were the aristocrats, wearing homespun coats, knee breeches and flat, broad-brimmed hats over hair falling to their shoulders. Others, dressed in strange garbs, were adventurers, practical jokers, and hard drinkers, frequenting the grog shops that occupied one-fourth of the town's buildings.

The ruler of this mixed lot of burghers and ruffians, the viceroy of the Amsterdam chamber of the West India Company, governor, commander-in-chief and supreme magistrate, was then Peter Stuyvesant, the seventh and last Dutch Director General of New Netherlands. A professional soldier, he was famous for his peg leg and his terrible temper. "Stiff-necked Peter," he was called by his disloyal subjects.

Stuyvesant came to New Amsterdam in 1647, six years before Francis Rombout. He had served as governor of the island of Curacao, in the Caribbean. He lost his right leg in an attack on the Portuguese island of St. Martin in 1644. Soon after his recovery, the West India Company assigned him to New Netherland with orders to establish colonists and freemen on the island of Manhattan and grant them as much land as they shall be able to cultivate.

The first thing he noticed, arriving in the colony, was that Fort Amsterdam needed repairs. His first message to the people was a demand for the "means" – meaning money and manpower – to fix the fort.

The people tried to ignore him, and their relations with the director, bad at the beginning, grew steadily worse. A soldier, he was easily confused by the bureaucratic orders, often conflicting, that he received from the company, and he was frustrated by the undisciplined crowd he was supposed to lead. He tried to collect duties on trade and improve the community. In response, the people sent delegations and petitions to Amsterdam, complaining about the director and demanding his recall.

The officials of the West India Company were well aware of the problem, and, while supporting Stuyvesant in principle, they knew better than he did the need for some concessions to the settlers. They sent instructions to Stuyvesant in 1652 to grant New Amsterdam "burgher government," similar to that of old Amsterdam. That meant a government of elected representatives – a *schout* or sheriff, two *burgermeesters* or mayors, and five *schepens* or aldermen.

Stuyvesant, as a good soldier, obeyed orders. But as a Colonial administrator, far removed from his superiors, he applied his own interpretation to the instructions. Early in 1653, the year that Rombout was to arrive, Stuyvesant proclaimed the incorporation of the City of New Amsterdam. He chose to appoint the officers himself, rather than permit their election, and he neglected to name a *schout*, whose powers might rival his own.

The court of *burgermeesters* and *schepens* was sworn in February 2, 1653, on Candlemas Day, the same day of the year that new magistrates of old Amsterdam were installed. The court met Mondays at 9 a.m. in the former *Stadt Herberg*, or city tavern, now City Hall, on the north side of Pearl Street, facing the East River waterfront.

The people embraced their new system of justice. They ran to the courts at the

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slightest provocation and for the smallest reason, whether to settle an argument or to collect a bill.



This building became New Amsterdam's City Hall in 1653 and was in use when Francis Rombout was mayor. It was built in 1641 at the foot of a low hill on the Strand (Pearl St. east of Broed St.), was 42 feet broad by 52 feet deep, and consisted of a basement, two stories, two lofts above the top story, and a kitchen in the rear. On Jan. 1, 1642, it was leased for a tavern to Phillip Gerritsen from Haarlem for six years at the annual rental of 300 guilders. The following year it was filled with refugees fleeing from Indian attacks caused by Gov. Kieft's unjust treatment of Indians. When the tavern closed in 1653, the building became City Hall. The cupola and dormer windows were then added and its entrance was changed to face the East River. (The picture is of a lithography by G. Hayward & Co. from a sketch made by Jasper Danckers for his Journal of a Voyage to N.Y., 1679-80, courtesy N.Y. Historical Society)

In this court, Rombout and Visser brought suit September 1, 1653, against the owner of the ship in which they had sailed to New Amsterdam. They appealed to the court, "having been in the defendant's service," to force Blommaert to render "payment of their monthly wages and lost time, as they are about to depart for home."

The young men, having looked over the colony and found it to their liking, apparently planned to return to the old country to collect their belongings and return to New Amsterdam to stay. They wanted their wages at once, but there was a good reason why they had not yet been paid.

Blommaert was not a cheat. He was a solid citizen, owner of a plot of land at the east end of the city, beside City Hall, as well as of the ship *New Amsterdam*. In that same year, 1653, he contributed 100 florins to the defense of the city. He was often sued for missing cargoes of codfish or wine, or for payments due in beaver skins or tobacco. But he was a patient man, and he gave a polite reply to the young sailors' suit.

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Blommaert informed the court that he did not refuse their payment, but that he did want "an account of their administration," meaning the account books for which Rombout had been responsible.

The new court was already swamped with suits for back wages, rents, ship passage, payments for sales of cloth, glass, tobacco, pigs, and even a sloop. The *burgermeisters* and *schepens* gave careful attention to the suit of Rombout and Visser vs. Blommaert.

The court named Johan Nefius and Cornelis Steenwyck as arbitrators. It authorized them to examine the ship's accounts at the house of Abraham La Nuoy, and instructed them to reach an agreement on the amount due Rombout and Visser or to submit an opinion in writing to the court.

Four weeks later, on September 29, 1653, the arbitrators returned the case to the decision of the court, having failed to obtain an agreement, and Rombout and Visser were ordered to present their claim again on the next court day.

But by then, Rombout, impatient to be on his way and apparently not lacking for funds, had left. He was not heard from in the colony again for more than three years.

It was late in the fall of 1656 when Rombout returned to New Amsterdam bringing with him his worldly belongings packed in a fine wardrobe of inlaid ebony and rosewood called a *kas*. On Monday, December 4, he appealed to the court again in his suit against Blommaert, to "decide the difference about loss of time, incurred costs, since arrest, such as monthly wages and board, left to the decision of the court by the appointed arbitrators."

Blommaert, showing patience and respect for the young plaintiff, but apparently having forgotten about the suit by then, asked the court for a copy of Rombout's demand. Blommaert promised to answer in the next court day, a week later. The court granted his request, and ordered Rombout to submit his demand in writing.

On the following Monday, as promised, Blommaert replied. It was noted in the court records for December 11, 1656: "He requests, so as not to delay the pltf. in the suit, that the court may please to appoint impartial commissioners to decide, in the presence of one of the bench, the point in dispute specifically, promising to pay the pltf. whatever shall be found fairly to belong to him."

Again, the court referred the case to Nefius and Steenwyck, instructing them to reconcile the parties "or otherwise to report thereon to the bench."

There being no further court record of the case, it could be assumed that Rombout received his just due, and the young man was on his way to success as a businessman in the New World.

There were many ways of doing business in New Netherland. It was the firm policy of the West India Company, as Stuyvesant was frequently reminded, that "trade should be free for everybody." The director did not like it. He complained of "Scots or Chinese dealers" who came to the colony, bought furs, tobacco, flour, fish or meat, and left without paying any taxes. He tried to impose a 1% tax on all exports. But when he directed all merchants to submit their books to him for examination, the company reminded him that this was "contrary to the course of free trade."

Smuggling flourished, and the company made no effort to stop it, and there were other ways to make fortunes. Out on Long Island, if a clever entrepreneur could find a dead whale, or hire the Indians to harpoon one, he could turn a quick profit from the oil and bones. The enterprising Dutchmen concocted schemes to raise silkworms, like the Chinese, or to catch sturgeon, to match the caviar of Muscovy.

The fur trade was the biggest and the best, and that was what attracted Rombout.

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He went into partnership with a Dutch friend, Gulian Verplanck. They established contact with the Wappinger Indians -- the friendliest of tribes in the Hudson Valley and the closest source of beaver and other pelts in large quantities. The young partners prospered, and Rombout soon became a prominent member of the colony.

He was also a highly eligible bachelor, a situation that soon brought him back into court. On January 29, 1657, Engeltie Mans brought suit against Geertie Jacobsen, wife of Geurt Coerten, a carter, charging that Geertie had told her and Rombout that "they had been discovered in something disgraceful."

Indignantly denying the alleged misconduct, Engeltie demanded "proof of her dishonor or punishment for the defendant."

Geertie confessed to the court that she had no personal knowledge of such dishonor, but said that she had been told by Jan Adamson that Engeltie and Rombout were "such people as nobody would suspect."

Geertie was found guilty of gossip mongering, and was condemned to "demand pardon of God, Justice and the wronged party, and further declare that she knows no dishonor of her, and moreover be fined 10 guilders."

Engeltie won her case. But she lost her man. It was she, not Rombout, who brought the suit, although both of them were involved, and while she was ready to air her association with Rombout in court, he was not so eager to discuss their relationship, whatever it was, in public.

Engeltie was known for her sharp tongue, and she was a familiar figure in court. She was sued once for scolding a man publicly and falsely, and calling him a thief. She denied the charge, and that case was dismissed. On another occasion, she sued the entire city government for money she said it owed her, and the magistrates, to get rid of her, wearily agreed that she should be paid.

The ever-prudent Rombout, an agile twenty-six year old, finally escaped Engeltie, and he remained a bachelor until he was thirty-four, a neat feat of artful dodging, considering the persistence of Engeltie and some of the other girls of the colony.

During the three years that he was away from New Amsterdam, on his farewell trip back to Europe, Rombout missed one of the most anguishing periods in Dutch history of the colony -- the Peach War. But with his luck, even a small war -- in which he took no part -- turned out to his advantage.

This was a time when the insecure little colony suffered from an ever-present sense of danger -- from the English to the north in New England and at sea, from the French in Canada, from the Indians on all sides, and from the Swedes to the south in New Sweden near what is now Wilmington, Delaware. A British blockage was lifted in 1654. The Indians were quiet. Director Stuyvesant chose this time to deal with the other danger -- the Swedes.

New Sweden, at the mouth of the Delaware River, was a colony of about 200 persons, founded at Fort Christina in 1638, by an expedition under Minuit. But twenty-six Dutch families lived nearby in their Fort Casimir. In 1654, the Swedes expelled the Dutch garrison from Fort Casimir and declared themselves in sole command of the territory.

Stuyvesant applied to the West India Company for permission to take action against the Swedes. A year later, in July, 1655, he received a shipload of reinforcements and orders to take the Delaware colony.

Drummers marched through New Amsterdam, beating out a call for volunteers. A proclamation was read, inviting "any lovers of the prosperity and security of the

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province of New Netherland, who were inclined to volunteer or to serve for reasonable pay, to come forward." They sailed, 600 to 700 strong, after church service on Sunday, September 5, 1655. Fort Cristina surrendered without firing a shot, and the Swedish flag came down in America.

But while the men of New Amsterdam were away on their expedition, disaster befell their colony. It was attacked on September 15, 1655, by Indians -- Mohawks, Mohicans, and tribes of the lower Hudson Valley -- in a provoked aggression.

One of the men who had not gone to New Sweden was Hendrick Van Dyck, a former sheriff who was addicted to drink. One night Van Dyck discovered an Indian woman stealing peaches from his orchard. In a drunken rage, he shot her to death.

The Indian revenge was quick and terrible. About 2,000 braves landed from sixty-four canoes and stalked through the city, breaking into houses. At first, they harmed no one. They explained that they were looking for enemies, Indians from the North. Actually, they were looking for Van Dyck.

The few men of the colony still at home did not hesitate to come out to talk to the Indians, with whom they had been at peace for years. They sought out the sachems (Indian chiefs) and invited them to the fort for a parley. The chiefs agreed to withdraw to Governor's Island. But after dark, the Indians returned, ran up De Heeres Street to Van Dyck's house and killed him, along with several other burghers.

The Dutch opened fire on the Indians, driving them to their canoes. But the war was not over. The Indians paddled to Staten Island, where they devastated farms and captured colonists. For three days, they terrorized New York Bay. They left one hundred Dutch dead, and took one hundred and fifty prisoners.

Throughout the expedition to New Sweden and the Peach War, Rombout remained away from the colony, but two casualties of that period had personal impact on him, -- one unfortunate, the other favorable.

His friend, Jan Visser, had decided not to accompany Rombout back to the Netherlands. He also elected not to volunteer for the campaign against the Swedes. One of the few able-bodied young men remaining on Manhattan, he entered the fight against the Indians and was killed. Rombout lost his first and closest friend in the colony.

Another man who had not gone to New Sweden was Paulus Van Der Grist, a retired sea captain, who operated a general store, selling dry goods and groceries. He also owned a sloop in coastal service. He had been in the colony for ten years, and was highly popular.

Van Der Grist had a small, comfortable stone house on De Heeres Street, the Broad Way that went north from the fort to Trinity Church. His was the first private stone house on Manhattan. It adjoined the church and the burial ground. His property extended back to the Hudson River, and was planted with trees and flowers.

His next-door neighbor was Henrick Van Dyck the man who started the Peach War. When the Indians came to take their revenge, Van Der Grist went out to the street and tried to calm them. They brained him with a tomahawk.

When Rombout returned to New Amsterdam in the following year, he found the house left vacant by the death of Van Der Grist, and bought it at a reasonable price. It remained the Rombout family home for the rest of his life, and became a social center of the colony.

On November 22, 1658, five years after he first set foot on Manhattan, Rombout signed a pledge to pay 20 *florins* worth of beaver pelts to the city, to obtain the rights

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of a Small Burgher, and he took the Burgher's oath.

Now came the twilight of the Dutch era in the New World, the last years of New Netherland, a time of frantic scrambling to make deals, deliver goods, collect payments, and keep out of court. In one complicated case, Rombout and two other businessmen, Samuel Etsal and Barent Van Maarle, were sued in 1661 by Eduard Prescott, a shipper. Prescott complained that he had delivered to the defendants fifty-five hogsheads of tobacco, which he had brought up in his ketch from Virginia, but that they had not paid him for three of the hogsheads. The case was settled out of court.

In 1663, Dirck Jansen sued Rombout, demanding thirty-six guilders in tobacco for freight that he had carried. Rombout replied that he had paid Deliverance Lamberton for the freight and "he will not pay the freight twice." Jansen then sued Lamberton. Lamberton replied that he had an account with Rombout, and "when it is settled, and he must pay Francois Rombout, he shall pay the pltf. his share."

The year 1664 was the last year of Dutch rule over Manhattan. The Dutch and the British were not at war formally, but the British were pressing their claim to the Dutch colony publicly on grounds that they were the original discoverers of the territory. Trying to forestall a British takeover, the States-General of the Netherlands confirmed on January 23, 1664, the charter of 1621, giving the West India Company jurisdiction over New Netherland, but in a frontier region, where the law of the jungle still prevailed, legal maneuvers served little purpose.

The people continued their pirouettes in court. On May 31, 1664, Rombout acted as interpreter for David Anderson, skipper of Henry Hutson's frigate, who was sued by Burgomaster Cornelis Steenwyck, acting for Hutson, demanding surrender of 4,411 pounds of hides and tobacco which the skipper apparently confiscated for himself. The court gave Steenwyck permission to take the frigate's sails and rudder as guarantees that the skipper would give up the goods.

Rombout made his last recorded appearance in the Dutch court on June 17, 1664, acting as attorney for Francis Sayer, suing Francois Souty for 2,375 pounds of tobacco. Rombout won the case, and the court ordered the defendant to pay.

By now, the British had made their formal claim to the colony. On March 12, King Charles II had arbitrarily granted to his brother James, Duke of York and Albany, all the land between the Connecticut River and Delaware Bay. On August 18, 1664, five British warships anchored off Manhattan and their commander demanded surrender of the colony.

The terrible-tempered Peter Stuyvesant wanted to fight. He ordered reinforcement of Fort Amsterdam, and he refused to reply to the British. But the fort had no running water and little ammunition; it was built for defense against bows and arrows, not naval guns. There were no supplies to withstand a siege, and the little wooden houses, clustered outside the walls, were easy prey to fire.

Only Stuyvesant wanted to fight. Among his countrymen, hard-headed and practical people, there was no spirit of patriotism, no desire for self-sacrifice in the interests of a commercial company.

The burghers, the clergy, weeping women and wailing children all appealed to Stuyvesant to surrender. He finally gave in, more to his own people than to the British. Leaving the fort, he received a British delegation in his farm house and turned the colony over to them, but only after receiving assurances of freedom and guarantees of the right of private property for the Dutch citizens.

New Amsterdam became New York. For the people, it meant simply that a Duke,

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far away in London, had been substituted for a group of merchants, even farther away in Amsterdam, as the abstract sovereign of a city that ruled itself. For a businessman like Rombout, the change was actually welcome. The new British officials set out to ingratiate themselves with the people. Many of the duties and taxes which Stuyvesant attempted to collect for the West India Company were dropped by the British. Soon, business was booming.

The court of *Burgermeisters* and *Schepens* now became the Mayor's Court. The mayor and the aldermen served as judges. Rombout was back before the bench, but now he had outgrown the petty suits, and he appeared more often as the court-appointed arbitrator in the disputes of others.

One year after the arrival of the British, when he was thirty-four years old and a twelve-year veteran of the colony, Francis Rombout took his first wife, Aeltje Wessels, and a year later, his first child was born, Johannis Rombout, baptized on August 12, 1666.

Rombout's success seemed complete. He had a wife and heir. His business prospered. The dining table in his store house was the first in the colony to be covered with linen. His orchard and garden flourished. He had social standing and official rank.

Rombout and his partner, Gulian Verplanck, went to court on July 30, 1667, to collect a bad debt. Their petition, "prosecuting an attachment made by them on goods in their hands, belonging to Francis Young, at present in Virginia," asked that the goods be "condemned" as "part payment of debt." The court ruled, "The arrest is valid."

In the same year, 1667, Rombout pledged ten beaver pelts as his contribution to the support of the Dutch Reformed Church. He was appointed by the mayor and aldermen on January 21, 1668, to be inspector of bread, the city official assigned to watch over the weight and quality of loaves sold to the public.

In court, he continued to win his cases. On July 7, 1668, Francis Rombout sued Balthazar d'Haert for a payment of rye, and won. On August 24, 1669, Rombout and Verplanck sued Reynier Van Der Coele for 325 florins, and won.

The tax list of 1674 estimated Francis Rombout's worth at \$2,000, making him one of the wealthiest men in the city, although Frederick Philipse, with his mansion and mill at Tarrytown and his fleet of ships, was by far the wealthiest, at \$32,000.

But Rombout still had to contend with the hazards of frontier life. Within ten years of his first marriage, his young wife and their son died. In 1675, Rombout married his first wife's sister-in-law, Anna Elizabeth Maschop, widow of Warnaer Wessels. She bore no children, and soon died.

Without a wife, and childless, Rombout devoted himself to business and public service, and at the age of forty-eight, after serving several times as alderman, he became mayor of New York. This office was filled annually by appointment, made by the governor in Council. It was an honor and a duty that was accepted by Dutch as well as English citizens, and was offered equally by the representative of the British Crown to men of either national origin. In 1678, the mayor had been the Dutch merchant, Stephanus Van Cortlandt, who latter became Rombout's business partner and Madam Brett's godfather. In 1679, the succession to the mayoralty fell to Francis Rombout.

During his year as mayor, Rombout had an unusual encounter with a pair of pious but suspicious characters who were prowling around the province for no apparent good reason. They were secret agents of a religious sect, sent to America to seek a place

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for a colony of their own. They traveled under false names. They evaded official regulations. They lied about their purpose. But they kept a diary that provided a rare and illuminating account of Catharyna Brett's father in official office.

These men were Jasper Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter, "speaking brothers," or preachers of the Labadist sect, a group of Protestants leading a communal life in the Netherlands. The sect was founded by Jean de Labadie, an aristocratic Jesuit priest who was banished from France in 1657 after turning Protestant. His followers settled at Wieuwerd, in the northern Dutch province of Friesland. They sent Danckaerts and Sluyter to America in 1679 to explore the possibility of establishing another commune there.

Danckaerts was the leader and scribe of the expedition. He recorded that they sailed to America in the *Charles*, registered in New York. Danckaerts gave his name on the passenger list as J. Schilders, his mother's maiden name. He identified Sluyter as "my good friend P. Vorstman."

They found a room in a boarding house, and wandered around the city, taking notes of people and places. Their surreptitious conduct came to the attention of Governor Sir Edmund Andros, who directed Rombout to find out who these two were, and what they were doing.

The "Journal of Jasper Danckaerts 1679-1680" reported:

"A person who, they said, was the thief-catcher, came to our house in the evening and, by order of the governor, summoned us to appear at eight o'clock the next morning at the house of Rombouts^s, the mayor of the city, and give our names and further information as to our doings and condition, as all strangers now and henceforth, whether men or women, must do."

Danckaerts professed to be "somewhat astonished" by the summons, "since they had told us, as was certainly true, that such had never been the custom." What induced them to adopt this course, we do not know," he wrote. But he and Sluyter obeyed the order promptly. Danckaerts recorded in his journal:

"We went in company with the old woman where we lodged to Mayor Rombouts at the appointed time. When we arrived, there was a magistrate's officer or two in attendance, and some came in while we were there."

Francis Rombout gave them a cordial greeting. "Friends," he said, "we have summoned you here, not because we have anything to say to you, or have any debt to claim, or because one has sought of us to demand of you any such thing, or to summon you." The reason they were summoned, the mayor explained, was that they had been in the city for some time without reporting their names, professions, and the purpose of their visit to the authorities. "We answered," Danckaerts wrote, "that we would by no means have been in default if there were any law or order which required us to do so, or if we had been informed that it was customary, or had ever been done; and it therefore surprised us that they complained and charged us with neglect of duty, or found fault with us, or wished to convict us of a matter where there was no law, obligation, custom, or even precedent; that this treatment struck us a very strange,

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since there were several foreigners who had come over in the ship with us, from whom they had not required what they required of us."

Rombout replied quietly, "You know well it is the custom in Europe."

Danckaerts insisted, "It was not so in any of the United Provinces (of Holland) or any other places except upon the frontiers."

"Well," Rombout said, "we are no frontier, but a capital, and it must and shall be so in the future."

Having made his point that they must register, Rombout then asked the men their "names, trade or profession, and place of residence in Fatherland," Danckaerts wrote, "all of which we told him, namely that my comrade was a theologian, and had studied in Leyden; that I was a wine-racker, and that we both lived near Leeuwarden, in Friesland."

Rombout asked why they had come to America, Danckaerts wrote, and "we told him it was to look at the country."

"How, look at the country?" Rombout asked. "Some come here to look at the cities, others at the fortifications; some to learn the mode of government and policy, others the manner of regulating the militia; others again to learn the climate and times and seasons, and you run and travel through the country without giving us any notice why."

"We replied, we had come here and traveled through the country in order to make ourselves acquainted generally with the nature and fertility of the soil," Danckaerts wrote.

Rombout accepted that flagrant falsehood as an answer, or at least he gave up trying to learn the real reason for their visit. Instead, he turned to another formality, and inquired whether the two wished to be considered as citizens of New York or as foreigners. Foreigners, they said.

"Well, then," he proceeded, "you are forbidden to carry on trade, particularly with the inhabitants, that is, to sell anything to private persons, but you may dispose of it to merchants who sell to private individuals."

"We replied to this, we would cheerfully obey the law," Danckaerts wrote. "We were also told to travel nowhere, particularly to Albany, without special permission from the governor, which we said we would ask from his Excellency, and thereupon we left."

If the interview left an impression of Rombout as a somewhat pompous bureaucrat, easily deceived, it should be remembered that the episode was recorded by his adversary. Even by that account, Rombout was a dignified gentleman who gave undeservedly decent, courteous, generous attention to a pair of interlopers.

Danckaerts and Sluyter sailed back to Holland in 1680, but they returned to America in 1683, bringing the nucleus of a Labadist colony. They settled in Maryland, the domain of Lord Baltimore, where freedom of religion was respected more than in other parts of the colonies. The Labadists created a commune there, similar to their establishment in Holland, but they dispersed at about the same time that the sect disintegrated in 1698 in the home country.

Francis Rombout served the remainder of his one-year term uneventfully, with no further adventures recorded in such detail as his encounter with the Labadists. But soon after he left office, Rombout received a startling reward for his service to the Crown — he was accused of treason.

This was a scurrilous charge, brought against one of the most eminent and respected

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men of the colony by a professional gambler with a reputation as a card cheat and scoundrel. But justice was dispensed freely and fairly in the colony, and the courts were open to all, even to a knave with an unwarranted complaint against a distinguished citizen. And the administration of Colonial justice could be tricky. Preposterous as the charge appeared to be, Rombout took it very seriously.

John Tuder, describing himself as a "born subject" of the King and an attorney living in New York, but widely known as a swindler, charged that Francis Rombout, as mayor, was guilty of treason for denying Tuder a trial by jury on charges of cheating Abraham Smith at cards. The mayor's court, consisting of the mayor, an alderman and the sheriff, had, in fact, convicted Tuder and ordered him to return Smith's money. Tuder maintained that, since he was born in England, he was entitled to a jury trial.

The charge was referred to a grand jury which returned a true bill against former Mayor Rombout in June, 1683, alleging that, with his associates when he was in office, he had, "as a false traitor" to the king, plotted and practiced innovations in government and subversion of the known ancient and fundamental laws of the realm of England, by denying a jury trial to Tuder. Upon Rombout's petition, trial was referred to the next session of the Court of Assizes.

In October 1683, Rombout pleaded that the indictment against him was "insufficient," since it was based on a judgment against Tuder, given in the mayor's court, of which Rombout was only one of three members. The Court of Assizes not only dismissed the indictment, but also upheld the decision of the mayor's court against Tuder, "restore the money he got at play of Abraham Smith." "It was not treason or any crime, but justice done to the party concerned therein," the Court of Assizes ruled.

While the treason case was still pending, Rombout married for the third and last time, at the age of fifty-two, taking to his stone house on September 8, 1683, Helena Teller Van Ball, twice widowed. From this marriage, four years later, Catharyna was born.

It was in that same year, 1683, a busy one indeed for Rombout, that he concluded his deal with the Wappinger Indians for purchase of their land on the east bank of the Hudson, midway between New York and Albany, the land that was to become the estate of Madam Brett. When Rombout bought it, this territory was not deemed very attractive. It was low, swampy, rocky, and heavily wooded. British settlers were much more interested in the high, dry, west bank of the river. Rombout, however, wanted it as a base for his fur trade.

After leaving the mayor's office, Rombout received from Governor Sir Thomas Dongan on February 8, 1682, a license to negotiate with the Indians for their land. Rombout and his partner, Gulian Verplanck, negotiated for ten months, and a real negotiation it was. There was no trace of white man's trickery, and some evidence that the red men were the smarter traders.

Such was Rombout's reputation as a shrewd businessman that it was taken for granted in the colony that he had outsmarted the Indians. During the negotiations, according to a popular legend, Rombout proposed a price for "all the land he could see." Since they were standing on the low east bank of the Hudson, rimmed by hills, so the story went, he could not see very far, and the Indians agreed. Then, the story concluded, Rombout climbed a thousand feet up to the top of Mount Beacon, where he viewed an immense tract, and claimed it all.

Actually, the negotiations were carried on by agents for Rombout, and the Indians

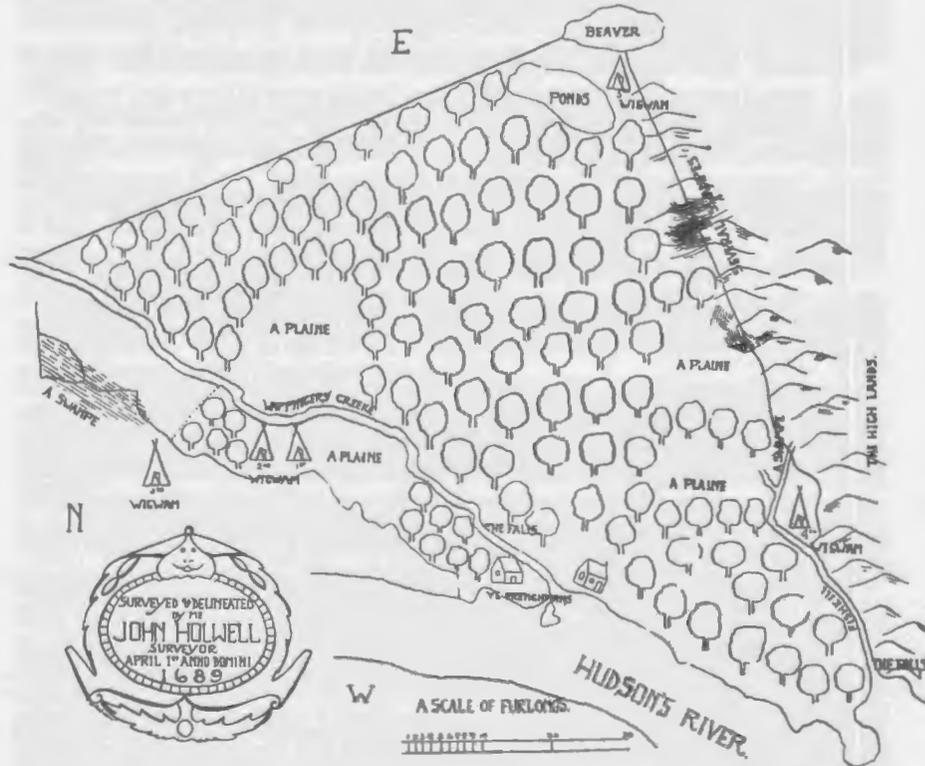
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got the better of the bargain. A more likely account of the negotiations had it that a table was set out under the trees. On one side of the rough board sat the white agents in homespun shirts, pantaloons, knee boots and broad hats with upturned rims. Across from them sat the Indians, naked to the waist, wearing leather leggings, moccasins and feathered head dress.

The white men pushed forward the Royal coins and other objects they were offering for the land. The Indians pushed them back, demanding "more . . . more." Finally, the deal was made, and the Indian deed of sale was signed by them on August 8, 1683.

"To all Christian people to whom this present writing shall come," the deed began. Naming the Indian chiefs, it said, "true and lawful owners and Indian proprietors of the land herein menchoned send greeting, KNOW YEE...."

The deed proceeded to grant Rombout and Verplanck the land lying between the Fish Kill and Wappingers Kill, east from the Hudson, "into the woods, fouer houers going." The land was paced off to a distance of about sixteen miles. It amounted to about 85,000 acres.



Map of the Rombout Patent drawn in 1689 by John Holwell, surveyor, shows the 85,000 acres granted to Francis Rombout and his partners in 1685. The map indicates sparse settlements including five wigwams and two structures possibly belonging to squatters near the mouth of the Wappinger. The Bretts built their mill at the mouth of the Fish Kill at the southwest corner of the patent. (The original map is in the collection of the New York Historical Society.)

In exchange, the white partners paid the Indians thirty "articles." These included English Royalls, black and white wampum, guns, ammunnition, rum, beer, tobacco,

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hatchets, horns, shirts, stockings, cloth, kettles, blankets, and pipes -- all articles that the Indians held in high esteem. At the going rates the price was high. It was estimated to be worth \$1,250, compared to the \$24 that Minit paid for Manhattan. The Wappingers stayed on their land until 1756 when their chief, Daniel Nimham, a friend of Madam Brett, led them to safety in Stockbridge, Mass., during the French and Indian war.

In addition to paying the Indians, Rombout and Verplanck promised to deliver six bushels of "good and merchandisable winter wheat" annually to Governor Dongan. This was a token payment in recognition of British sovereignty. The partners, wanting the land only for a hunting and trading post, not for settlement, were happy to have the Indians stay in the territory.

The royal letters patent, completing the sale, were granted by King James II on October 17, 1685. Before the patent was issued, Gulian Verplanck died. Jacobus Kipp married his widow, and took his place in the partnership. Stephanus Van Cortlandt bought a one-third interest, completing partnership in the patent.

Rombout considered this purchase the crowning achievement of his business career. He described the Indian deed as "perfect." The British patent was the first issued for land on the Hudson. It was recorded in the colony's book of land grants. While other titles fell open to questions and quarrels, Rombout's was good enough to stand for centuries as guarantee of ownership of the land.

But his family life remained unfulfilled: he lacked an heir. It was not enough that the boy who came to the colony three decades before was now a successful businessman, former mayor and respected member of society. This ambitious, acquisitive, gregarious man, surrounded by his wife's seven children from her two previous marriages, must have wanted a child of his own.

By his first marriage, he had a son who died in infancy. His second marriage was childless. By his third marriage, he had another son, Jannetje, baptized September 5, 1684, who also died young. But then Rombout had a daughter, Catharyna, baptized May 25, 1687 -- a healthy child. Another son, Johannis, was baptized June 12, 1689, and soon died. But Catharyna survived.

Now, Rombout possessed his heir. Although he was only in his fifties, he began to feel weary, and he foresaw his own end. In January of 1691, he went to the notary, William Bogardus, and made his will.

To his wife, Helena, Rombout left 4,000 *guilders* in cash, and all the income of their common estate "until she marries again, or to the time the testator's daughter, Catharyna Rombout, gotten by said wife, shall come to marriage or to her age." The will noted that Rombout had already given his daughter his "land in the Wappins."

Since Catharyna was then only three years old, Rombout appointed four guardians to watch over her education and estates "in case of the death or marriage of his widow." The guardians were William Teller, Catharyna's maternal grandfather; Peter De La Noy, mayor of New York; Dr. Samuel Staats, native New York physician, who had studied medicine in Holland; and Paul Richards, wealthy wine merchant and proprietor of Long Island vineyards. The future Madam Brett was entrusted to the elite of the colony.

Soon after making his will, Rombout fell ill. Early in the year 1691, while serving as a member of the council of Governor Henry Sloughter in the reign of King William III, Rombout died at the age of fifty-six. His will was "proved" in court April 21, 1691.

The patrimony of the future Madam Brett awaited her.

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CHAPTER THREE

Catharyna Rombout grew up, in the last years of the seventeenth century, in her family's stone house on Broadway. She grew up to be an endearing child in what was essentially a happy home at an exciting time. The little half-Walloon girl was the baby of a well-to-do Dutch family with a loving mother, seven half-brothers and half-sisters, white servants and black slaves, all crowded into the small cozy rooms, crammed with handmade Colonial furniture and imported pieces from Holland.

In addition to a one-third share of an 85,000-acre tract of land up the Hudson, which Catharyna did not know about then, she owned a little doll which she loved. It was only twelve inches long, but it had a bisque head, with a pretty face painted on the hard earthenware, and a soft body which she dressed in ends of the nicest cloth.

Catharyna also had a set of pewter doll dishes. Most of her land, eventually, she sold, but the doll and dishes, she kept all her life.

She learned to read, so well that she came to enjoy and to collect books, most of them on religious subjects. Later in life, she had her own bookplates printed:

Catharyn Brett, her book,
When you have used it unto the end,
Pray send it home -- I did it lend.

Her writing became fluent, although her language was a thoroughly personal melange of Dutch and English, difficult to decipher. She spoke English with a Dutch accent which lent piquancy to her speech. Her arithmetic was excellent, and would serve her well in her later years in business life. She studied at home, there being no public school yet in the Colonial community. In accordance with Dutch custom, all girls as well as boys were educated.

The house was a charming, enchanted place for a growing child. It stood on the west side of Broadway, about half a mile above the lower tip of Manhattan and just below Trinity cemetery, at the corner of a lane that was to be named Rector Street. The house was surrounded by a large garden. In the rear, a peach orchard extended almost 1,000 feet to the shore of the Hudson River.

The rooms were filled with fascinating objects. The dominant piece was a Holland cupboard, its shelves containing colorful porcelain and gray earthenware. The cupboard was the most valuable single piece of furniture in the house. It was estimated to be worth £15 sterling, in an inventory of the contents of the house, taken at the time of the death of Catharyna's father. A silver set consisting of a tankard, two beakers, three tumblers and two salt cellars was valued at £20.

In the hall stood a wooden rack for hats, another for periwigs, an oval table, a looking glass, and a large chair. The living room contained, in addition to the Holland cupboard, a desk, leather chairs, a couch, bookcases, spinning wheels and a fireplace with a brass hearthstead. The windows were covered with white calico curtains. The bedrooms were furnished with bedsteads, stone tables, water pitchers, and candlesticks.⁹

In the kitchen, the flames from a wide, open fireplace with its black iron spit cast a

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glow over brass kettles, iron pots and pewter dishes. There were water pails, milk pails, a churn, a baking trough, a gridiron, tongs, bread graters, an ironing board, brass lamps and candlesticks, and a cupboard holding piles of towels, tablecloths, napkins, sheets and pillow cases.

Outside, a cow and a heifer grazed in the orchard.

Catharyna played in the yard with her brothers and sisters and neighboring children. As she grew older, she attended church, family gatherings, and social functions.

Her oldest brother was Cornelius Bogardus, son of Helena Teller by her first marriage, and grandson of two of New Amsterdam's most remarkable characters, the Rev. Everardus Bogardus and his wife, known as Anneke Jans.

The Dominie Bogardus was the pioneer minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in the colony -- and a fiery one. He engaged in furious arguments with Dutch officials for what he deemed to be lack of support for his church, and he heaped abuse on his congregation for lack of devotion to the church. He was, in turn, accused of being a common scold and a drunkard.

The minister married Anneke Jans, widow of Roelof Jans, who had received a grant of sixty-two acres on Manhattan between the Hudson River and Broadway. This property became famous as the Dominie's Bouewert, or country place. Anneke was celebrated for her beauty, with, wealth, and numerous descendants.

The Dominie's mission became impossible when soldiers took to playing noisy games outside his church, and beating drums and firing cannon while he tried to deliver his sermon. He sailed for home in 1647 to defend himself against charges of improper conduct, but he never made it. The ship *Princess* sank off the coast of Wales, and he drowned. His widow moved up the Hudson to Beaverwyck, and there she died in 1668.

Anneke Jans' land was sold by her heirs in 1671 to Colonel Francis Lovelace, then the British governor. The property was later incorporated in the King's Farm, and presented by Queen Anne to Trinity Church. One of Anneke Jan' heirs was not present at the original sale, a circumstance that exposed the transaction to challenge and resulted in centuries of useless litigation. A multitude of Anneke Jan' descendants were persuaded by unscrupulous promoters that they were the rightful heirs to a choice piece of Manhattan, but no such claims ever succeeded.

After Anneke Jans' grandson, Cornelius Bogardus, the oldest child in Catharyna Rombout's family, came the Van Balls, born to Helena Teller by her second marriage. There was a boy, Henry, and five girls -- Maria, Margaret, Helena, Rachel and Hannah. The youngest Van Ball, Hannah, was mentally retarded and never grew up. The others were normal, healthy, lively Dutch children.¹⁰

Catharyna Rombout and her half-brothers and half-sisters, Cornelius Bogardus and the Van Balls, were bright, jolly children, but they grew up to be sensible, intelligent, serious, and successful citizens, gracious, dignified, respected and accepted in the highest society of Colonial times. No longer was the Dutchman in New York a clown. He was an American.

At the turn of the century, when Catharyna was thirteen years old, New York was a burgeoning, brawling port and frontier town of about 750 houses with 4,500 white residents and 750 free and slave blacks. About half of the whites were English and half Dutch with a few Frenchmen and Swedes.

Business was done on the opposite side of the island from the Rombout home --

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along the East River -- where the salt water never froze and the docks remained open all winter. Catharyna never ventured over there.

There, the empty spars of the sailing vessels stretched to the sky, like the naked branches of a forest in winter, and the prows of the ships poked over the waterfront. There, merchants in broad-rimmed hats, long velvet coats and knee breeches, leaning on canes, transacted their affairs with sailors in bandannas, short jackets and aprons. The slave-traders and the privateers and the pirates mingled with honest men engaged in the West Indies trade, or the long coastal run, or the short haul over to Long Island, and who was to know the difference? This was where the drinking and the gambling took place, and the cruel practical jokes were played amid profane talk and rough-and-tumble fighting.

Broadway and the Hudson River side of the island, where the Rombouts lived, was the quiet, residential part of town. Here, the gentlemen wore wigs and knee-length brocade coats and silver-buckled shoes. Ladies strolled through the streets in flowing, full-length dresses, tight bodices and picture hats. Here, life was civilized, even elegant on occasion.

Although the town was small, Catharyna did not lack for playmates among her relatives and neighbors. One of the neighbors, who lived on Liberty Street, three blocks north of the Rombout house, was the daughter of Captain Kidd. Catharyna was thirteen years old, old enough to understand the drama, when the "Prince of Pirates" came to the close of his fantastic career.

He had been a quiet man and, if he was noticed at all, a good neighbor. He was a Naval officer with a reputation as a capable commander. When the British functionaries, who had winked at piracy in exchange for part of the loot, finally decided that the practice had to end, they chose Captain William Kidd as the man to suppress the pirates.

He was commissioned January 26, 1696, to apprehend all pirates wherever he should find them and bring them to trial. All property taken from the pirates was to go to the persons who paid for the fitting-out of Kidd's ship, one-tenth being reserved for the King.

Captain Kidd set sail from New York in April, 1696, but once at sea, he raised the black flag himself. For three years, he terrorized the sea lanes, stopping ships, plundering their cargo, capturing their crews, and killing any who resisted. He did not fear to put into American ports, a liberty that stirred suspicion that he had the sanction of British officials. He buried his loot where he pleased. Some of it was found eventually on Gardiner's Island, off the eastern end of Long Island, a discovery that started centuries of treasure hunts. The career of Captain Kidd ended in ignominy.

The British, who could stand the stigma no longer, captured him July 6, 1699, in Boston and sent him to England. He was hanged at Wapping on the Thames May 23, 1700. His Dutch widow, the former Sarah Oort, and their daughter lived on in shamed seclusion in New York.

Centuries later, a local legend was still current in Dutchess County, connecting the pirate with Catharyna Rombout Brett. According to the legend, while Catharyna and her husband Roger slept quietly one night in their homestead at Fishkill Landing, a longboat slipped ashore from the Hudson River and a crew of pirates crept stealthily into the garden, carrying a large box -- part of Captain Kidd's treasure. They dug a hole, so the story went, and buried the box, and with it the body of one of their own crew, killed in a thieves' falling-out over shares in the fortune.

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Then, it was said, the pirates replaced the turf so that the digging was never noticed, and they departed, leaving Madam Brett to plant flowers over the buried treasure and corpse.

If the legend were true, the pirates must have carried the treasure around for a long time. For the Bretts did not move into their homestead until 1709, nine years after Captain Kidd was hanged.

When Captain Kidd was swinging on the gallows, Catharyna Rombout was still a young girl growing up in New York. She had not yet met Roger Brett, and she was approaching womanhood in a sprightly Colonial society presided over by Richard Coote, Earl of Bellomont, the governor of the colony.

Lord Bellomont was a tall, dignified, charming nobleman. A confidante of William and Mary -- advisor to the King and former household treasurer to the Queen -- he was as influential, able, and honest a man as could be found for the difficult, somewhat undesirable post in New York, far from the royal court.

When he arrived April 2, 1698, he was given the traditional welcome, reserved for new governors. New Yorkers were not usually happy with their governors, but they knew their protocol and loved a party. The city corporation, headed that year by Mayor Johannes De Peyster, put on a banquet for 150 persons. They ate venison, turkey, chicken, goose, duck, beef, mutton, lamb, veal, port, sausages with pastry, puddings, cakes, and drank the finest wines of France.

Lord Bellomont, always stately, almost to the point of pomposity, expressed his pleasure over the food and the address of loyalty that was directed to him, and through him to the King.

After the official banquet there was a round of private dinner parties given by the leading families of the city. Mrs. Rombout may have been the hostess on one of these occasions. Both she as the widow of a former mayor, and Catharyna, then eleven years old, may well have been present. Young ladies were accepted early in society. Lady Bellomont, then in her thirties, was only twelve years old when she married the Earl.

Lord Bellomont's pleasure and popularity soon expired. He complained that the city was politically unstable with an empty treasury, a ragged garrison, and a crumbling fort. His own mansion had a leaking roof and rotted floors. His powers were restricted by King William and the Lords of Trade in London, and he had to govern in New York with the consent of the seven appointed members of his council and the nineteen elected members of the assembly who held the colony's purse strings and voted the appropriations -- including funds for the governor.

Lord Bellomont pronounced himself in opposition to piracy, free elections, disorderly conduct and smuggling -- and in favor of cutting the salaries of city officials. This did little to endear him to the colony's leaders. He also proposed to break up the huge estates along the Hudson that had been granted by the King to merchants, fur traders, government officials, and speculators. The governor suspected that some of the land had been obtained illegally. He felt that the great estates discouraged small landowners and stifled progress. He resolved to limit land-holding. The Rombout patent, although perfectly legal, was one that would have been affected.

Bellomont's land bill was passed by his council and the assembly, but such was the clamor of protest raised by the wealthy families that the bill was tabled by the Lords of Trade in London, much to Bellomont's mortification. His plan never took effect.

Bellomont, by now a discouraged and morose man, died in New York on March 5, 1701, at the age of 65. He was buried in the chapel of the fort. His widow remained

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in New York for a year and then returned to London where she remarried. Bellomont's administration meant little personally to Catharyna Rombout. That of his successor would mean a great deal to her.

Edward Hyde, Lord Cornbury, son and heir of the Earl of Clarendon, and first cousin of Queen Anne, arrived in New York May 3, 1702, to become governor. With him came Roger Brett.

Cornbury was a soldier who owed his appointment as governor of New York to an act of treachery and desertion. Born in 1661, he was in command of three regiments of cavalry at the age of twenty-seven when William, Protestant Prince of Orange, was in the process of driving the Catholic King James II from the throne of England in 1688. Cornbury, a nephew of King James, deserted his royal relative and led his men into William's camp outside Salisbury. For this treason he was rewarded by King William thirteen years later with the New York post.

His detractors, who became legion in later years, often cited this action in Cornbury's youth as a reflection of his character. He explained that he had acted only under the military orders of his superior, John Churchill, who later became the first Earl of Marlborough and commander-in-chief of the forces of King William III.

Cornbury was a snob who demanded deference in society and absolute obedience from those around him. A man of military bearing, he was also a female impersonator, who wore women's clothes because he fancied it gave him a resemblance to his cousin, Queen Anne. Despite his heavy black eyebrows, long nose and sagging jowls, he sat for a portrait wearing a dark wig and low-cut dress and holding a string of beads. He was a good husband to Katharine, Baroness Clifton of Leighton Bromswold, Warwickshire. He fathered three children. Yet he was reputed to indulge in unspeakable private vices. Although he was a friend of Roger Brett whom he held in respect and treated with courtesy. He signed his letters to Brett, "Your most humble Servant, Cornbury."

Brett was a commoner from the county of Somersetshire, in southwest England. He came from a sea-faring family, a Captain Brett having fought the Barbary pirates for Queen Elizabeth I. He was a lieutenant in the navy, a well-educated, good-mannered, much-traveled young man of high principles and impeccable morals. He was also a young man of piety. Soon after his arrival in New York, he was listed as a vestryman of Trinity Church, and was active in administering the temporal affairs of the little parish. Brett was registered as a resident of the East Ward. The Rombouts lived in the West Ward.

Lord Bellomont had been dead, and the post of governor vacant, for more than a year when Cornbury reached New York. It took the packets more than two months to make the voyage, and that was the only way for news to travel and business to be transacted between the colony and the mother country. Appointed governor by King William, Cornbury sailed from England early in 1702, as soon as the winter storms subsided. While he was at sea, King William died on March 7, 1702, and Queen Anne was crowned on April 23. All this, Cornbury learned only after he reached New York in May.

It was mid-June before he received royal orders to proclaim the accession of Queen Anne in New York and New Jersey. More than three months had passed before the people of the colonies were informed officially of the change in monarchs. But they fared no worse than if they had watched the coronation on television. Their governor remained the same. Lord Cornbury was advised that his cousin, the Queen, immedi-

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ately after ascending the throne, had been pleased to confirm his appointment. In fact, she began a direct, personal correspondence with him and sent him detailed instructions.

Cornbury was given the traditional grand banquet by the city corporation of New York. Immediately, he began a constant series of receptions, teas, and dinners at the Governor's mansion. With his entourage, he made the rounds of private parties at the homes of citizens. He presided periodically over a Governor's Ball, the ultimate social occasion of Colonial society.

Lady Cornbury, a frail young Irish noblewoman, became the titular leader -- and, in fact, the active arbiter -- of New York society. The daughter of Lord O'Brian and grand-daughter of the Earl of Richmond of Ireland, she married Cornbury on July 10, 1688, at the age of seventeen, and accompanied him fourteen years later to America.

Before leaving England, she was already suffering from a pulmonary complaint. Four of her seven children died young. She never recovered her health in New York. During the four years that she lived in the colony, she played to the hilt the part of surrogate of the Queen.

Daily, she drove through the city in her carriage to call on specially-selected subjects. Since hers was the only horse-drawn carriage in the city at the time, her subjects could hear her coming, and since she developed a practice of appropriating for herself anything in their homes that pleased her, the cry would go up at her approach, "Here comes milady. Hide this! Hide that!"

She "borrowed" coats and gowns, which were never returned. Larger items, such as furniture and decorations, she would send for the morning after her visit. She accompanied Cornbury on his state visits, and once, after a trip to Albany for an Indian council, she returned to New York with an otter skin muff that she had extracted from the innocent natives.

Her subjects attributed her avarice to a penny-pinching husband who apparently gave her an allowance so small that she was forced to scrounge from others. But she apparently took for granted her right to confiscate, as would the Queen, anything she desired.

Like the Queen, with ladies-in-waiting, Lady Cornbury kept eight or ten young women of the city's best families in attendance on her. They spent their days at the governor's mansion, sewing and performing other suitable chores. When Lady Cornbury went out on her social calls, they trailed along behind her.

The Rombout house, with its treasures, must have been a favorite place for her to call. Catharyna Rombout, fifteen years old when the Cornburys arrived, was a logical choice for a young lady-in-waiting. It may have been in this way that she was introduced to the governor's mansion -- and to Roger Brett.

At first they had little in common, not even the church. While Catharyna attended the Dutch Reformed Church on Broadway above Morris Street, Roger went to the Church of England, Trinity, farther north on Broadway, but going to church, Roger did pass Catharyna's house.

Otherwise, what could have drawn them together? She was a little girl of fifteen. He was a mature officer of the Royal Navy. She was a provincial child in a colonial port. He wrote Gentleman after his name. She was the youngest of a large family. He was a bachelor. She was raised in the serious, staid Dutch tradition. He came from a gay, bright British mold.

Still, differences in age and manner mattered little in the colony. Prospects for a mate

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were limited, and marriages were made early in life. Catharyna may have been impressed by Roger, but not awed. He may have been indifferent toward her at first, but was soon touched. It did no harm that she was already wealthy in her own right, and he was one of the most eligible young men in the retinue of the governor.

There was little social life that summer of 1702. During the spring, there had been a great deal of smallpox. The hot weather brought an appalling epidemic of yellow fever. The infection spread rapidly through the city, and those who contracted the disease rarely recovered. About 500 persons died, one-tenth of the entire population.

Lord Cornbury, fearing for the life of his wife, who was an invalid, took her, their three children and the servants out to Jamaica, on Long Island. People who stayed in the city avoided personal contacts as much as possible.

Lord Cornbury's family came through the summer unscathed. They stayed in the parsonage of the Presbyterian church in Jamaica, that being the most suitable house in the region. The governor liked it so much that, before leaving, he gave the house and church to the Long Islanders of his own sect, the Episcopalians. The outraged Presbyterians tried to take the house back by force, but they were out-numbered by the Episcopalians, who enjoyed the support of the governor's servants, and the Presbyterians were defeated after a furious battle. Only after years of legal contests did the Presbyterians get their church back through the courts.

When Cornbury and the many others who had fled the city returned to New York in the autumn, the social life was resumed.

Although the city had been under British rule for nearly forty years, its style was still a mixture of Dutch and English, surrounded by a raw, rowdy frontier atmosphere. Men frequented taverns daily and gambled and caroused nightly. Profanity, practical jokes, and intoxication were widespread. Heavy drinkers and punsters were popular, but there was also an elegant society. Families offered gay hospitality -- luncheons, teas, dinners, concerts, and dances -- in their neat, handsome houses with rich furnishings and numerous slaves. There many occasions for Catharyna and Roger to meet.

It was not a sudden romance -- they had known each other for more than a year. Eventually, they fell in love. They obtained a marriage license from Lord Cornbury on November 25, 1703.

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

CHAPTER FOUR

Roger Brett took his bride to her stone house on Broadway, and moved in with her family. There was room for him, because her brothers, Cornelius Bogardus and Henry Van Ball, had married and gone to live with their wives, and four of her older half-sisters were by now also married and living in their own homes.

But there would be no feminine twittering over him in that sturdy Dutch household. The mother, three times a widow, would know how to put him to work. And the daughters were well accustomed to having him around the house. Roger was registered as "master of family" and was in all probability an aid and comfort to Helena who was getting on in years.

Of the Van Ball sisters, Maria, the oldest, had married Isaac De Peyster. Margaret married Nicholas Evertsen; Helena, the Rev. Gualterius Du Bois; and Rachel, Petrus Bayard. Only Hannah, the youngest of the Van Balls, remained at home. Mentally retarded from birth, she never grew up.

The house did not seem empty for long, however, for sixteen months after their marriage, Catharyna and Roger had a son, Thomas, named after Roger's father.

It was not necessary for Roger to engage in gainful employment. The revenues from the Rombout estate were sufficient to support them in good style. In the meantime he was busy; there were family business chores to perform and meetings to attend. He had no bent for politics, which he avoided like the plague.

He continued to serve as a vestryman at Trinity Church. There were numerous social events -- and the numerous weddings of his sisters-in-law -- to which he escorted Catharyna. And they were frequent guests at the governor's mansion.

This was a trying time for Lord Cornbury. The outrageous New Jersey Assembly rejected a salary for him of £2,000 a year for twenty years, and had the audacity to offer him only £1,300 a year for three years. He had disliked that province ever since the start of his rule, when he became stuck in the mud in East New Jersey and was unable to proclaim the accession of Queen Anne in Amboy. He dissolved its assembly, and the newly-elected legislature granted him his 2,000 a year, but only for two years. It was a sum so considerable that Samuel Jennings, Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, a Quaker with a disarmingly mild manner, commented upon hearing the original request from Cornbury, "Then, thee must be very needy."

The confounded New York Assembly voted the £1,500 he requested to place two stone batteries on the Narrows, at the entrance to the harbor, to protect the port against hostile ships, but the legislators insisted on appointing their own treasurer to handle the funds. Cornbury objected on a point of honor, but the citizens insisted so much money had been squandered on similar projects with no guns to show for the expenditure that they demanded financial supervision.

It served them right that a French privateer should then appear in the harbor and frighten them half out of their wits.

The ship went away quietly, but now the pressure for fortifications was so great that £3,000 were appropriated, and, over Cornbury's objections, the Queen permitted the Assembly to appoint its own treasurer for extraordinary expenses. Abraham De Peyster was named treasurer.

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Cornbury had gone the 150 miles up the Hudson to Albany to placate the unruly Indians who were the colony's principal protection against the French. He met the sachems of the Five Nations and gave them the traditional, dangerous, and ridiculous presents of guns and knives, blankets and kettles, baubles and beads, rum and beer.

The governor found that the savage devils were more cunning than he had realized. They kept the rum hidden away until they finished their bargaining with him, knowing full well that they would be drunk as soon as they tapped the liquor. In exchange for the presents, they promised to follow their white leaders and report any hostile movements by the enemy. Still, Cornbury did not trust them. Upon his return to New York, he informed the Lords of Trade in London that the only way to defend the colony was to drive the French out of Canada.

Cornbury encountered all kinds of other distractions. The excitable citizens came running to him with news that they had found a giant tooth weighing 4 3/4 pounds in a sandy hill near Claverack on the Hudson. It seemed to be a source of delight and personal pride for them to discover that a mammoth had once lived in America.

Hardly had that excitement died down when a band of privateers brought in a Spanish man-of-war they had captured at sea. They fell drunk on the bad wine they found in the Spanish hold, and they marched through the streets, singing ribald songs and uttering foul oaths. Soldiers from the fort finally put them to flight, but only after a skirmish in which one privateer and one soldier were killed.

Cornbury preferred to spend his time in his mansion, consuming his ample meals, playing cards, or presiding over his well-attended soirees which consisted largely of his guests listening to him talk. Occasionally, he presided over the Governor's Ball, the ultimate event of Colonial society.

Roger and Catharyna Brett listened to the governor's complaints and danced, and passed time with the governor's children, about their age, but tragedy hung over the governor's mansion with its leaking roof and rotting floors.

Lady Cornbury who had long been ill wasted away and grew weaker. She was confined to her bed, and Lord Cornbury stationed himself by her side day and night. This ogre of a governor suddenly became a frightened husband. He ordered the best of care for his wife. He chided doctors and nurses for the least negligence. He stormed at servants for the slightest sound, but it was to no avail.

Lady Cornbury died at 11:30 p. m., Sunday, August 11, 1706, at the age of thirty-four, leaving a grief-stricken husband and three of her seven children -- a son and two daughters. She was buried in Trinity cemetery.

In the Rombout house, a year later, death called again. Mrs. Rombout, having laid three husbands to rest and brought up eight children, died in 1707.

It was assumed that Mrs. Rombout died intestate, and that the entire estate would go to Catharyna, the only surviving child of Francis Rombout. That had clearly been his intention in leaving his fortune to his widow "until she marries again," which she never did, "or to the time the testator's daughter, Catharyna Rombout, gotten by said wife, shall come to her marriage or her age," a condition which Catharyna had amply fulfilled.

Therefore, as a matter of course, Lord Cornbury appointed Roger Brett as administrator of the estate, with full powers to dispense the funds which obviously belonged to his young wife.

At the time of Catharyna's marriage, when she was only sixteen years old, her mother continued to retain control of the Rombout possessions. No one questioned

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the wisdom of the matriarch in her lifetime; in death, she was heard from once more.

Among her papers was found a will of her own. It had been made in November 1706, three years after Catharyna's marriage and several months before her own death. It cut off Catharyna from the Rombout money, splitting it instead six ways among the Van Balls.

The document, dated November 20, 1706, read:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, Helena Rombout of New York, widow, considering the frailty of this present life; I leave to my eldest son Cornelius Bogardus £5. I have before this time given and paid considerable sums of money to him and for his use. I leave to my youngest daughter Catherine, wife of Roger Brett, 9 pence, current money of N. Y. I leave all the rest of my estate to my son Henry Van Ball, and to my daughters Maria, wife of Isaac De Peyster, Margaret, wife of Nicholas Evertsen, Helena, wife of Gualterius Du Bois, and Rachel, wife of Petrus Bayard.

"I order 1/6th of my estate put out at interest for the use of my daughter Hannah, who is non compos mentis. I make my son and sons-in-law executors.

"Witnesses Evert Van Hook, Cornelius Clopper, Abraham Gouverneur."

Mrs. Rombout evidently intended no malice toward her oldest son or her youngest daughter. Bogardus had been well taken care of by her in her lifetime, and he was also provided for by the estate of his grandmother, Anneke Jans. Catharyna Brett owned the family house in New York and her father's land up the Hudson. The Van Balls had the least financially and were the most in need of funds.

Mrs. Rombout had done what so many mothers have done so often, and often so foolishly. Understandably, she tried to provide equally for all her children by all her marriages. In so doing, she split the estate into fractions too small to support anyone.

There must have been many family conferences among the half-brothers Bogardus and Van Ball, the De Peysters, the Evertsens, the Du Bois, the Bayards and, most sorely injured, the Bretts. They were left with an expensive house, an unproductive forest - and no cash.

Their own family was growing. Their first child, Thomas, had been baptized in the Dutch church March 11, 1705. A frail child, he died at age nine. Their second child, Francis Rombout Brett, was born in 1707, the year of Mrs. Rombout's death. He lived to the age of eighty.

This was a family of friends; money could not divide them. They faced their problem in a friendly manner, and years later, they were still naming their children after each other.

Catharyna and her siblings accepted their mother's will without challenge. Roger Brett did not feel the same loyalty to his late mother-in-law. He went to Lord Cornbury and petitioned the governor to stay execution of the will until his brothers-in-law posted bonds as executors. This was not a contest, but a delaying action. Six months later, Brett withdrew his action and the members of the Van Ball family were granted powers of administration.

Catharyna Brett received her inheritance of 9 pennies in March, 1708. She and Roger now found themselves land poor. How could they keep up the house on Broadway with its staff of servants? What could they do with the wilderness to the north? How could they provide for themselves and their child? Catharyna could never have dreamed of such a predicament and could only count on her husband for a solution. Roger was no businessman, but he was intelligent and he had a suggestion: they should go to live off the land on the Hudson.

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Years later, her descendants liked to think that it was a pioneer spirit, love of nature and an ambition to build that caused the Bretts to go up the river. Actually, what it came down to was a matter of finding a way to support themselves and their family on their inheritance.

Catharyna's father had not intended to live in the land of the Wappingers. To him it was a trading post on which the Indians were welcome to live, and possession of which was useful in keeping a monopoly on the beaver, otter and other furs of the region. In any case Catharyna was probably startled at first by her husband's idea of moving there and assailed by many questions.

Where would they live, there being no known residence in the region except a single shanty of a French squatter on the bank of the Hudson and the wigwams of the Indians in the interior? How would they support themselves, there being no business or profession to perform except the trade with the Indians for their furs, which was already being done by company agents? What would they eat, without stores, and where could they go, without roads? With whom would they associate, the Indians? How would they amuse themselves, by fishing and hunting? Most important to her, how could they raise their son, alone in the wilderness. It must have struck the sedate Dutch mind of young Madam Brett as a wild idea.

To Roger Brett, an Englishman from a county of comparatively small, family-owned farms, the idea was not strange at all. The land was there and it was theirs. And land could mean money. He had what to him was a good, sound, simple—although, in those days, somewhat radical—idea. He would sell the land.

In those days, the Dutch patroons and the English lords of manor never sold their land. They kept it in a feudal system of permanent leases to tenant farmers with the owners living on the rents. This medieval practice retarded the development of the region, and it took the resentment of rebellious farmers to overthrow the system eventually. Until then, the masters would retain title to their full estates.

Roger Brett had a problem that they did not have. He needed cash, more cash than would come in from rent, and the prospect of selling his wife's land—lot by lot—did not alarm him in the least.

He thought out his solution carefully. First, they would have to acquire title to their share of the land, which was still owned jointly by the three original partners. Then, they would obtain a mortgage on the Broadway house. With this cash, they could purchase supplies and go north to explore the property. They would go back and forth by sloop until their new home was ready. Then, they would sell the Broadway house, move to the country and sell off the land.

To whom would he lease the land, Catharyna must have wondered. There were people in the city who would like a cool place in the heat of summer and a safe place during epidemics. There were people on Long Island who were already feeling crowded and wanted more farm land. There were the tenant farmers who longed to own their own land and be able to pass the property on to their heirs. And there were the newcomers to America looking for a place to settle. Roger foresaw plenty of customers.

The Verplanck-Kipp and the Van Cortlandt families did not share Brett's views on disposition of property. For generations they kept their land. But they did not stand in the way of the young couple, who were trying to make a living. Soon after the death of Helena Rombout, the Bretts filed a friendly suit in Supreme Court in 1707, asking for division of the Rombout patent among its partners. The other partners agreed to

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the proceeding, and the court issued a writ in 1708 for the division.

This was the first partition of its kind in New York, the beginning of the breakup of the great land grants from the Crown, and its importance was clear to all concerned. Sheriff Bartholomew Noxon was assigned to the task, and he took twelve men with him to do it. Validity of land claims for centuries to come depended on the lines that they then drew. They surveyed the 85,000 acres and divided them into three parts.

It was an equitable division, with each of the parts fronting on the Hudson River and extending eastward into the woods. Lot Number One, the southernmost and nearest to the city was the most advantageous. The partners gave that tract to the Bretts.

This was a rich expanse of 28,000 acres, starting on the Hudson River and stretching inland between the Fishkill Creek on the south and the mouth of Wappingers Creek on the north. It included the fertile Fishkill valley, studded with wide plains, Indian camps and beaver ponds among the forests, and rimmed with round, blue mountains.

The Verplanck estate received Lot Number Two, the middle tier, north of the Bretts' and east from the Hudson to the central course of Wappingers Creek. The Van Cortlandt heirs took Lot Number Three, northernmost and east from the Hudson to the head of Wappingers Creek.

With his title to the land clear, Brett went to call on James Emott to arrange a mortgage on the Broadway house. Emott was a distinguished attorney who had tried some of the colony's most celebrated cases, serving at times as king's counsel. He was also an important land-owner himself, being one of the holders of the Great Nine Partners Patent. This was to the north of and almost twice as large as the Rombout Patent, which pre-dated it by twelve years.

The nine partners were some of the most prominent men of the colony. Their acquisition that had led the previous governor, Lord Bellomont, to suspect some of the land grants and to try to break up the vast estates. Lord Bellomont accused Emott of being a "lackey" of his predecessor, Lord Fletcher, implying that they made some kind of improper deal for the land. And he suspected Emott of being implicated somehow in smuggling and piracy.

Lord Bellomont's successor as governor, Lord Cornbury, held no puritanical views about possession of property in large amounts, and he looked upon Emott with favor.

For a man suspected of being a sponsor of pirates, Emott was a pious person. He was one of the original vestrymen of Trinity Church. He became acquainted with Brett when the young man joined the church, and they served together as vestrymen. Emott had a lot of cash as well as land. He may have been surprised by the idea of breaking up a patent, but he was willing to help Brett.

Emott gave Brett "£240 current money" on June 8, 1708, for a mortgage on the Broadway house. This was a substantial sum, considering that the Town Clerk's annual salary was £20. But it did not represent the full value of the house, and more money was raised eventually on the property. The Bretts continued to live in the house and Roger now had the means to finance his expedition up the river.

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CHAPTER FIVE

At the start of the eighteenth century, there was only one road north from Manhattan to the Rombout Patent lands. That was the King's Highway, which went through the Brett property on the way from New York to Albany. Crossing the Bretts' land, between Fishkill Creek and Wappingers Creek, the highway followed a blazed trail through the woods. The creeks were crossed by ford.

A law of the Colony of New York, enacted June 19, 1703, provided for a road from King's Bridge, Westchester County, through Dutchess and Ulster Counties to Albany which should be "at least four rods wide (66 feet)." In Dutchess County, the prescribed width was at least six rods (99 feet), but the county was required to keep the road clear for "horse and man only." A subsequent act of October 30, 1708 provided that freeholders and residents along the way should keep common highways free of branches, brush and stones.

The King's Highway was wide enough to carry the mails and individual travelers on horseback between New York and Albany. It was not enough to sustain the community contemplated by Roger Brett in 1708 for Dutchess County.

The main means of travel was the Hudson River sloop, a picturesque single-masted sailing vessel that provided the most popular transportation of the time for passengers and freight. The sloop, taking its name from the Dutch Sloep, was a ship of about one hundred tons, sixty-five to seventy-five feet long, with a mast more than one hundred feet tall. It carried a mainsail, jib, and topsail. It was steered by a long, hand-manuevered tiller.

Seeking the wind and the ocean tide, which influences the Hudson all the way up the river to Albany, the sloops glided to and fro as gracefully as flocks of gulls. They were faster than stagecoaches, averaging five to six miles an hour, and much more comfortable. The high quarter-decks provided shelter in cabins. Outside, the passengers could promenade on the open deck.

Washington Irving, whose efforts to be funny at the expense of Dutch Americans often resulted only in forced humor and perpetuated false impressions of a fine people, even succeeded in slandering the elegant, indispensable sloop. In his story "Dolph Heyliger," Irving wrote that a voyage up the Hudson from New York to Albany was "an undertaking of some moment" and the "sloops were often many days on the way" while "coming to anchor at night" and "stopping to send the boat ashore for milk for tea."

Actually, the sloops sailed by night unless the wind failed, which was not often. They carried their own provisions, and they made the 150-mile trip from New York to Albany in about twenty-four hours. Once, under exceptionally favorable conditions of wind and tide, a sloop made the run from New York to the Brett property at Fishkill Landing, a distance of sixty miles, in five hours. Usually, it took about twelve hours.

That was the way that the Bretts traveled to their new home in the wilderness. During the summer of 1708, Roger Brett sailed back and forth, carrying equipment and supplies to Fishkill Landing. Catharyna, twenty-one years old and expecting her third child, waited in New York until he had a house and grist mill built on the bank of the Hudson at the mouth of Fishkill Creek.

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

One day, this cove would be the death of Roger Brett. But at first, it must have been a scene of sheer enchantment for a former sailor, looking for a place to settle.

Here, the Hudson, flowing south from the Adirondack Mountains, spread out into a mile wide lake, and the tide water, surging north through stone palisades, turned from salt to fresh. On the west bank of the river, there was high ground, but on the east, the shoreline was low and hospitable. The green forest grew down to the water's edge. A small point of land, curving southward from the shore, created a smooth bay, good for anchoring the sloop. Ashore, inside the point, was a brown trampled patch of ground where a small boat could be beached. A path led into the woods.

This had been Rombout's landing, where the traders originally went ashore to meet the Indians and buy their furs. Just below the landing, where Fishkill Creek emptied into the Hudson, the shore was swampy. But along the north bank of the creek, the path rose gradually until, half-a-mile inland, it reached high ground, a clearing and rapid water.

The Bretts' first house and the mill rose on the north bank of the creek close to its junction with the river. Construction was completed by the autumn of 1708, and before the snow fell -- although Madam Brett was not feeling well in her third pregnancy - she and her sons Thomas, aged three, and Francis, one year old, sailed up to stay at Fishkill Landing.

When they arrived they found a single white family for neighbors, a friendly settler named Peter Du Bois and his wife, Jannetje. The first map of the area, drawn by the surveyor John Holwell in 1689, after Rombout's purchase of the region, showed two houses at the mouth of Wappingers Creek marked, "Ye Frenchman." When Sheriff Noxon drew the next map in 1707, at Brett's request, for the division of Rombout Patent, it showed no structure on Wappingers Creek but two buildings -- apparently a house and barn -- at the mouth of Fishkill Creek.

Local tradition had it that "Ye Frenchman" was a fellow known in Dutch as *Peche dewall*, or Pete the Walloon. This must have been Peter Du Bois, who was a Huguenot, not a Walloon. But to the Dutch settlers, any Protestant who spoke French was a Walloon.

The Du Bois were not idle wanderers, but a middle-class French Protestant family. Peter's father, Jacques, moved from Catholic France to Holland in the mid-17th century, and then to America, bringing the infant Peter. The father died soon after settling in Ulster County, on the west bank of the Hudson, and his son was brought up there. Having reached maturity and taken a wife, he looked for a place to raise his family.

Apparently Du Bois came as a squatter to Wappinger Creek and then settled at Fishkill Creek, with no legal claim to the land. According to local legend, Du Bois and his wife cleared the land by hand. During his first winter there, he walked to New York over Indian trails and towed supplies home through the snow on a sled, it was said, but later, he was able to buy a horse, and life was easier for him. Far from resenting the intrusion, the Bretts welcomed their Huguenot neighbors.

Catharyna, all her life, was careful of her land. It was her principal material possession, and she devoted her life to guarding it zealously and disposing of it profitably. But she was also generous. Because Du Bois was already there when she arrived, she gave him a life-lease to the land he occupied.

There was no legal record of it at the time. It was only ten years later, in 1718, that the Clerk of Dutchess County began keeping records of deeds for land in Rombout

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

Precinct and other parts of the county. Catharyna never bothered to record the Du Bois lease, but Peter spent all the rest of his life there in peace.¹¹

After he died in June, 1737, his lease became a matter of record. On May 30, 1738, Catharyna Brett of Fishkill, widow, and her son Francis Brett, gentleman, sold to Jacobus De Peyster of the City of New York "a parcel called the Island, formerly in the possession of Peter Du Bois, tenant for life," and "109 acres near the Island, adjoining Hudson's River and Fishkill Bay, formerly in the possession of said Peter Du Bois, tenant for life." The "Island" was actually a peninsula, later known as Denning's Point, the tip of which was separated from the shore by high tide in Colonial times.

Du Bois was a good friend to the Bretts. He served as witness to many of Madam Brett's land sales. He became the head of a great Dutchess County family, providing the region in its pioneer days with a surveyor, a merchant, a brewer, a cooper, and a sloopman. Francis Brett married a Du Bois -- Catherine. After Catharyna Brett's death, a Peter Du Bois, descendant of Ye Frenchman, was an executor of her estate.

The ambitious Roger Brett planned a much larger community than this primitive colony of two families. Populating the wilderness presented no small problem, but Brett was obviously confident that he could do it. Building a mill, as well as a house, and bringing his young, expectant wife and child to the forest gave clear evidence of his satisfaction with the prospects for creating a comfortable home and agreeable neighborhood.

He began slowly, leasing land to tenants, rather than selling it to freeholders. Leasing was the common system for land development along the Hudson, as practiced by the great property holders -- Philipse to the south and Van Cortland and Verplanck to the north. The tenants paid little or no rent, but cleared the land and built houses in exchange for the right to live there. The system had the advantages of attracting good workers and satisfying their longing for land. It had the disadvantages of failing to provide the owner with cash and depriving the tenant of the rights to possess the land and pass the fruits of his labor on to his heirs.

Between 1708 and 1713, the Bretts gave leases to six tenants: John Terboss, 180 acres; Thomas Brasier, 100; Peter Du Bois, 100; John Bois, 80; Casper Prince, 100; and Julien Springsten, 60. Peter Du Bois, Ye Frenchman, was already on the scene when the Bretts arrived. The others may have come to help Brett build his house and mill. In later years, the Bretts were known to give land in exchange for labor.

When the first census of Dutchess County was taken in 1714, two of the original tenants -- Brasier and Prince -- had disappeared. But Terboss, Du Bois, Bois and Springsten were still there.

The Terboss family grew to prominence in the county. Its members eventually donated the land for "a meeting house and a burying yard" for "professors of the Presbyterian religion in the communion according to the establishment of the Kirk of Scotland." They were Scots among the Dutch Walloon, Huguenots, French and English. John Terboss was elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1716 and served as representative until his death in 1723.

Peter Du Bois was listed as a taxpayer until his death in 1738. Bois and Springsten also paid taxes for many years. They became a stable, prosperous group of settlers.

In addition to the white tenants, the Bretts had one other set of friends and neighbors -- the Wappinger Indians.

"There lived a Vast many Indians in this place when we first Came here," Catharyna Brett wrote years later. To her, the word "vast" did not necessarily mean a very large

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Precinct and other parts of the county. Catharyna never bothered to record the Du Bois lease, but Peter spent all the rest of his life there in peace.¹¹

After he died in June, 1737, his lease became a matter of record. On May 30, 1738, Catharyna Brett of Fishkill, widow, and her son Francis Brett, gentleman, sold to Jacobus De Peyster of the City of New York "a parcel called the Island, formerly in the possession of Peter Du Bois, tenant for life," and "109 acres near the Island, adjoining Hudson's River and Fishkill Bay, formerly in the possession of said Peter Du Bois, tenant for life." The "Island" was actually a peninsula, later known as Denning's Point, the tip of which was separated from the shore by high tide in Colonial times.

Du Bois was a good friend to the Bretts. He served as witness to many of Madam Brett's land sales. He became the head of a great Dutchess County family, providing the region in its pioneer days with a surveyor, a merchant, a brewer, a cooper, and a sloopman. Francis Brett married a Du Bois -- Catherine. After Catharyna Brett's death, a Peter Du Bois, descendant of Ye Frenchman, was an executor of her estate.

The ambitious Roger Brett planned a much larger community than this primitive colony of two families. Populating the wilderness presented no small problem, but Brett was obviously confident that he could do it. Building a mill, as well as a house, and bringing his young, expectant wife and child to the forest gave clear evidence of his satisfaction with the prospects for creating a comfortable home and agreeable neighborhood.

He began slowly, leasing land to tenants, rather than selling it to freeholders. Leasing was the common system for land development along the Hudson, as practiced by the great property holders -- Philipse to the south and Van Cortland and Verplanck to the north. The tenants paid little or no rent, but cleared the land and built houses in exchange for the right to live there. The system had the advantages of attracting good workers and satisfying their longing for land. It had the disadvantages of failing to provide the owner with cash and depriving the tenant of the rights to possess the land and pass the fruits of his labor on to his heirs.

Between 1708 and 1713, the Bretts gave leases to six tenants: John Terboss, 180 acres; Thomas Brasier, 100; Peter Du Bois, 100; John Bois, 80; Casper Prince, 100; and Julien Springsten, 60. Peter Du Bois, Ye Frenchman, was already on the scene when the Bretts arrived. The others may have come to help Brett build his house and mill. In later years, the Bretts were known to give land in exchange for labor.

When the first census of Dutchess County was taken in 1714, two of the original tenants -- Brasier and Prince -- had disappeared. But Terboss, Du Bois, Bois and Springsten were still there.

The Terboss family grew to prominence in the county. Its members eventually donated the land for "a meeting house and a burying yard" for "professors of the Presbyterian religion in the communion according to the establishment of the Kirk of Scotland." They were Scots among the Dutch Walloon, Huguenots, French and English. John Terboss was elected to the Provincial Assembly in 1716 and served as representative until his death in 1723.

Peter Du Bois was listed as a taxpayer until his death in 1738. Bois and Springsten also paid taxes for many years. They became a stable, prosperous group of settlers.

In addition to the white tenants, the Bretts had one other set of friends and neighbors -- the Wappinger Indians.

"There lived a Vast many Indians in this place when we first Came here," Catharyna Brett wrote years later. To her, the word "vast" did not necessarily mean a very large

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number. She used that word also to describe the number of people of Poughkeepsie causing her trouble, when Poughkeepsie was a tiny town. But there were certainly enough Indians to be considered part of the population.

The first map of Rombout Patent, in 1689, showing the two houses of Ye Frenchman at the mouth of Wappingers Creek, also contained two cones labeled "wigwam" farther up the creek, another wigwam between the Hudson and a swamp to the north, and two more on the southern side of the patent, one on Fishkill Creek and another on a beaver pond in the interior. The five symbols apparently represented tribal villages rather than individual homes. The entire Wappinger population has been estimated, at its peak, at no more than 1,000.

The Wappingers, sometimes known in English as the Wappanachki, meaning in the Indian language "Men of the East," lived along the east bank of the Hudson River from Manhattan to Dutchess County. They were Algonquins, members of a widely-dispersed group of North American tribes, linked by speech in a single linguistic family.

The Algonquins occupied a greater area than any other group of Indians in aboriginal times -- spreading from Canada through New England, south to Cape Hatteras and west to the Ohio Valley. Their cultures varied widely, and often they could not understand each other's dialect, although the basic structure of their speech was the same.

Some of the Algonquins became famous -- King Philip in New England, Pocahontas in Virginia, Tecumseh and Pontiac in the Middle West. The Wappingers were not so famous.

As so often happened in the history of the colonies, the New York personalities never attained the celebrity or notoriety or the romantic role achieved by others. The Wappingers suffered the same fate at the hands of the historians as the Walloons who were overshadowed by the arrival of the Pilgrims three years later. The Wappingers were an important tribe. They had their heroes, but they were never celebrated in prose or poetry or song.

Their leader, or sachem, when the Bretts came to Dutchess County was Chief Nimham. He was a gentle soul, father-figure of a tribe that had sold its birthright and lived on the land only with the permission of the white people.

His son, Captain Daniel Nimham, eventually campaigned in vain to recover his people's land. He traveled to England, but failed to see the King. He died a hero's death, fighting on the side of the Americans in the Revolutionary War.

Although the father assumed the consequences for the sale of the land, he had not yet assumed the tribal leadership when Francis Rombout and his partners made their purchase in 1683.

The first Indian signature on the deed of sale was the mark of one named Sakoraghkigh, representing Megriskar, then sachem of the Wappingers, who was too proud to participate personally in the transaction. Twenty-one other Indians, named as co-owners of the property, had added their marks to the deed of sale. The name of Nimham was not among them. But when the Bretts came to develop the land a quarter-century later, Old Nimham, as Catharyna called him -- although he was about her age or even a little younger -- was the leader of the tribe.

Although they had sold the land with the understanding that they would move north, "retire over the mountains and join the Mohican nation," they had never gone any farther than the slopes of the Fishkill mountains along the southern border of the

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Rombout Patent. It was impossible for many of them to accept the concept that anyone could monopolize nature, or to realize that they should leave their ancestral home forever merely because they had affixed meaningless scrawls to a piece of paper and accepted gifts from the gullible white men.

The Indians, at first, caused no trouble. They were tall men, lean in their leather loin clouts, leggings and moccasins, clean with their shaven heads and scalp locks. They were no good for work, unless to carry an occasional message, which they did with great willingness and speed, but they were cheerful, friendly neighbors.

The Bretts' mill acted on them as an irresistible magnet, drawing them from their wigwams to the landing on the Hudson. On foot along forest trails and by canoe down the Fishkill Creek, they came to marvel at the wonder of the mill.

Their way to make meal was to hollow out a tree stump and polish its interior smooth. Above the hollow, they bent a supple sapling, and from that they dangled a round stone that bobbed up and down, pounding the kernels of corn into pulp.

The mill had a wooden wheel that turned mystically in the moving water of the creek. The wheel spun a shaft that turned gears and spun grooved stones between which the grain was crushed into golden trickles of grist. Soon, the Indians came to the mill with corn to be ground and furs to exchange for meal.

Indian boys came unafraid with their fathers. While the youngsters waited for the food, they played at shooting with their bows and arrows, knocking pennies out of a split stick at a distance of ten yards or more and hitting the pennies nineteen times out of twenty.

The Indians, in turn, invited the Bretts to their villages, clusters of huts made of stakes overlaid with bark, scattered around a "castle," or fort, a square of land surrounded by palisades, where the old men, women, and children took shelter while the men were away on hunting expeditions.

Catharyna Brett did not hesitate to visit the Indians, particularly the Nimhams after their boys became friends of her sons.

The Bretts and the Nimhams became such good friends that a time came when Old Nimham desired to establish their relationship on a firm basis, for as long as he could foresee. He asked Mistress Brett for a favor -- permission for him and his children to stay where they were, as long as they should live, without hindrance from her or her children. He did not try to measure the land, but asked only recognition that he could remain in peace on the place he occupied. In return, he promised that if he and his children ever left, or after they died, the land would belong to the Bretts.

This, she wrote, "I did in gratitude to Old Nimham, being he was a friend of mine."

Directly across the Hudson from the Bretts' landing, separated from them by almost two miles of deep, swirling water but close enough to be reached easily by canoe on a calm day, another community was taking form -- a settlement of Palatine Germans. In the autumn of 1708, while the Bretts were building their first house and mill on the east bank of the river, the Palatines were coming from the mid-Rhine valley to the west bank of the Hudson. They were neighbors such as Catharyna would have chosen -- placid people, hard workers and God-fearing Protestants, fugitives from the furies of Europe.

A year before, their homes had been ravaged by the Catholic armies of Louis XIV in the religious wars of 1707, and then, early in 1708, their vineyards and orchards were decimated by a great freeze. The Counts of the Palatinate were no help to them, taxing them into starvation in a silly, selfish effort to maintain courts that could rival the

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splendors of the French Sun King.

The Palatine people in their despair heard with fascination of a land far away but fair like their own where there were no taxes, and crops flourished in warm fields. Fortunately, there was a man to lead them there, their pastor, Joshua Kocherthal.

It was a small group that went first – forty-one men, women, and children from the Rheinisch town of Neuberg. They sailed down the Rhine to Rotterdam, where an English ship picked them up and took them to Harwich. Queen Anne, a relative of the Counts of Palatinate and a Protestant like the Palatines, sympathized with the refugees. Her ministers welcomed them for another reason: the Germans might provide perfect, natural opponents to the French, the Queen's enemies in America.

Pastor Kocherthal informed the Lords of Trade in London that his people were ready to settle in an English colony. He described their qualifications: "One is a joyner, another a smith, the others all versed in gardening, husbandry, planting and tillage."

The Queen ordered that they "should be settled upon the Hudson River in the province of New York," chosen for its similarity to the Rhine. The Palatines -- their number now swollen to about fifty by the birth of children and the advent of a few new recruits -- boarded the ship *Globe* in October 1708, and sailed for New York.

When they landed nine weeks later, they were dismayed to find snow and ice and to feel the wind as cold as the one that had frozen their Rhine Valley. They were given shelter in New York during the winter. With the coming of spring, they sailed up the river.

They landed on the west bank of the Hudson at the point where Quassaick Creek flowed into the river, a place like the Bretts' landing at the mouth of Fishkill Creek on the opposite bank of the river. The Palatines named their place Newburgh.

Quickly, they felled trees and built log cabins and cleared fields. So promising was the start of their community that Pastor Kocherthal stayed only a few weeks. Then, he hurried home to round up more refugees.

He brought them literally by the thousands. A year after the initial group of fifty Palatines had sailed for New York, more than 3,000 embarked from England in 1709. These were the unfortunate ones.

Pastor Kocherthal had evidently impressed the new governor of the province, Robert Hunter, (1709-1719) with the industriousness of his people, for the governor agreed to back the plan of bringing more Palatinates over here "to settle on the upper Hudson to produce naval stores for England. He was unable, however, to secure funds for the project from England or from his assembly and so Governor Hunter went into debt himself for \$21,000 to save the colony."¹²

The English authorities restricted them to land held by the Crown and assigned them to extract tar from pitch pine in camps along the Hudson to pay for their passage and upkeep. The German farmers were not trained or interested in the production of tar and the pine trees of the region were not particularly productive. The ill-conceived tar project was soon abandoned, and the Palatines, many of them in misery, eventually scattered to seek their fortunes elsewhere in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The first Palatines were more fortunate. The royal government granted them 2,190 acres of the Queen's land on the west bank of the Hudson, enough to assure them of a livelihood in the manner to which they were accustomed.

One of their first acts was to build a Lutheran church on Newburgh Bay. The denomination was neither Roger's nor Catharyna's, but Brett, former vestryman of Trinity parish of the Church of England, and Catharyna, daughter of a former elder of

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the Dutch Reformed Church, were pleased to be paddled across the river on Sundays to attend the Protestant services.

Thus, up the river, a new society was being formed of sturdy, industrious, self-sufficient people, mixed in nationality, religion, language and customs, but mingling easily in the free, stimulating life of the frontier.

Down the river, in New York, the old society of Lord Cornbury was coming to its close.

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CHAPTER SIX

Of all the British governors of the province of New York, contemporary Americans agreed Lord Cornbury was the worst. The Colonial historian Judge William Smith wrote: "We never had a governor so universally detested, nor any who so richly deserved the public abhorrence. In spite of his noble descent, his behavior was trifling, mean and extravagant. It was not uncommon for him to dress himself in a woman's habit and then to patrol the fort in which he resided. Such freaks of low humour exposed him to the universal contempt of the people; but their indignation was kindled by his despotic rule, savage bigotry, insatiable avarice, and injustice, not only to the public, but even his private creditors."

That judgment in *The History of the Late Province of New-York, from its Discovery, to the Appointment of Governor Golden in 1762* was rendered by the Honorable William Smith, who lived from 1728 to 1793, preferred British rule to American, fled to England during the Revolution, and became Chief Justice of Lower Canada.

Yet Lord Cornbury, this villain, this tyrant, this bigot, this wastrel, this miser, could also be generous and kind. In the autumn of 1708, he took quill pen in hand and wrote to his young friend, Roger Brett, up in Dutchess County:

Sir,

Yesterday sending my boy to the Post house to see if the Pensilvania Post had brought me any letters, at his return he told me there was a letter for you at the Post house. I sent for it not knowing but it might be of consequence to you, and send it here inclosed. There is noe news of the arrivall of the fleet at Boston yet but from Barbados there is an account that a packet boat arrived, those say that the fleet was sailed soe they may be expected every hour. On Sunday morning last my Daughter sailed out of the hook with a fair wind; she gave her service to Mrs. Brett and your self. I intreat you to give my respects to Mrs. Brett and believe that I am

Sr,

Your most humble servant
CORNBURY

The brief, courteous note gave no hint that this was a time of deep despair for Cornbury. His beloved wife had been dead for more than two years. His daughter, last of his children to be with him in the colony, had gone home to England. He lived alone, except for servants, in the dismal, decaying governor's mansion with its creaking floors and dripping roof, and after six years as governor, he had been dismissed from office, although he did not yet know it.

Despite his serious troubles with the colonists and with the Crown, he found time to help his friends, the Bretts. By now, Roger and Catharyna were securely installed in their first house in Dutchess County. No longer did they make the trip regularly up and down the Hudson by sloop. Their mail was entrusted to sloop masters and travelers going up the river. Cornbury, the mean and unjust governor, thoughtfully

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forwarded to the Bretts a letter that might otherwise have been lost at the post office.

His problems with the rest of the people he was supposed to govern were not so easily settled. The main problem was money.

When Cornbury arrived in the colony in 1702, his salary was established at £2,000 a year, to be appropriated by the Assemblies of New York and New Jersey. It was a sum so considerable that Samuel Jennings, Speaker of the New Jersey Assembly, a Quaker with a disarmingly mild manner, commented upon hearing the original request from Cornbury: "Then, thee must be very needy."

But this was the honeymoon period of his administration. Cornbury was a new governor, bringing the hope that comes with a new year or a new season or a new day. He served a new monarch. King William III, who appointed Cornbury as governor, died March 19, 1702, four days after Cornbury sailed from Spithead aboard the ship *Jersey*. Cornbury's cousin, Queen Anne, confirmed his commission.

When Cornbury arrived in New York May 3, 1702, he was at first received warmly by a people who looked forward to some change – a change that would be an improvement of their lot. The new governor brought with him 100 well-armed musketeers at a time when the people were grumbling about their defenses against the French and the Indians.

On the night of his arrival, the people gave Cornbury a lavish public dinner and a gold box containing a document conferring on him the freedom of the city. The municipal authorities congratulated him on his appointment. Cornbury delivered an acceptance speech that his listeners considered to be civil, courteous, and urbane.

His first actions pleased the people. He ordered freedom for all "white slaves" – political and criminal offenders who had been sent from England to the colony. He directed all civilian and military officials to remain at their posts. He dissolved the Assembly, but a new legislature was elected and his original request for funds was approved.

His relations with the colonists deteriorated rapidly. Within two years, Cornbury was demanding that the Assemblies guarantee him a salary of £2,000 a year for twenty years. The New Jersey legislature turned him down in 1704 and appropriated £1,300 a year for three years. Indignant, Cornbury dissolved the Assembly, and the new body gave him 2,000 a year for two years.

When the question arose again in 1706, the New Jersey Assembly refused to renew his salary at any figure. Cornbury resorted once more to dissolution of the legislature, but when the new Assembly met in April, 1707, its members ignored all proposals or requests put forth by the governor and proceeded instead to raise grievances against him.

Cornbury's principal tormentor was the Speaker, Samuel Jennings of the New Jersey Assembly, who had been the first to comment sarcastically, if softly, on the size of the governor's salary. The Quaker continued to speak softly in tone, but his words were strong.

When Cornbury convened the new Assembly in 1707, it was Jennings who confronted him with a list of complaints. With obvious relish, Jennings read the charges aloud to Cornbury's face, accusing him of accepting bribes, mishandling finances, and "encroaching upon popular liberty" by denying the right to vote to freeholders whom he did not like by ruling that they did not own enough land to cast a ballot.

Cornbury listened to the complaints. Hopping mad, each time he interrupted

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Jennings with shouts of, "Stop, what's that,?" while the speaker calmly went back and read the charge over again.

The New Jersey Assembly not only presented its charges to Cornbury, it put them in the form of a petition to the Queen, asking removal of the governor.

Frustrated in New Jersey, Cornbury returned to New York only to encounter more serious resistance. The New York representatives refused to renew his salary, and they assumed tight control over government expenditures. Before consenting to an appropriation for presents to the Indians, for example, they insisted on seeing a list of the gifts in advance.

The collector and receiver-general, Thomas Byerly, reported to the Assembly that the treasury was empty and that he could not account for funds because his predecessor as treasurer was withholding government records as security for his own back pay.

The New York Assembly appointed a Committee on Grievances in 1708, with William Nicholls, Speaker of the House, as chairman.

This group adopted a series of resolutions, among them:

"Resolved, that appointing coroners without being chosen by the people is a grievance and contrary to law."

"Resolved, that erecting of a court of equity without consent in General Assembly is contrary to law, without precedent, and of dangerous consequence to the liberty and property of the subjects."

Most significant of all was this one:

"Resolved, that imposing and levying of any moneys upon Her Majesty's subjects of this colony, without consent in General Assembly, is a grievance and a violation of the people's property."

These resolutions were sent to London with petitions, signed by some of the most influential citizens of the colony, respectfully but firmly requesting the removal of the governor, primarily on grounds of misappropriation of public funds and immoral private practices.

Cornbury, if he knew about the charges of immorality, did not reply to them. Indeed, what could he say? If, by immorality, the colonists meant his wearing women's clothes to look like the Queen, how could he deny that to her Majesty, particularly since he had a portrait of himself in a long dress? If they meant something worse, without specifying the crime, what defense could he offer? He chose to ignore the personal charges.

He went to his own defense strongly on the financial charges. He called his council into session October 27, 1708, informed the members of the complaints against him and then left them alone to deliberate on whether he had misappropriated public moneys.

The members of the council, being his appointees, were naturally prejudiced in his favor. But they went through the motions of deliberating in his absence. They produced a report saying that they "do not know that His Excellency has received any money out of the Public Revenue other than by warrants passed in council in the usual manner, which warrants have been either for his salary or towards defraying the expense of His Excellency's expedition to Albany from time to time."

This report, having all the appearance of a whitewash, failed to answer the principal

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charge that he had appropriated funds without the permission of the elected Assembly.

Without the knowledge of the adversaries in New York, the issue was already settled. On March 28, 1708, Queen Anne's chief secretary of state, Lord Sunderland, informed the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations that John, Lord Lovelace, had been appointed governor of New York and New Jersey in place of Lord Cornbury.

There was no royal reprimand of Cornbury. To the contrary, there was every indication that the Queen and the Lords of Trade sympathized with the governor in his trials with the colonists. He had frequently complained to London about "the kind of people" he had to govern. The mixture of English, French, German, and Dutch character, gradually emerging as American, did not appeal to the rulers in London, any more than it did to Cornbury in New York. But his administration had become too troublesome, and it was simpler to replace him than to put up with the constant, tiresome petitions of his opponents.

Apart from money, the problem that may have alienated Cornbury the most from the colonists was the church. In this, if he erred at all, it was on the side of the angels. But this may have been the controversy that finally convinced the Queen to remove him.

Early in his administration, he irritated many people by confiscating the house of the Presbyterian minister, Mr. Hubbard, in Jamaica, Long Island, and turning it over -- with the meeting house -- to the Church of England.

Cornbury's justification of that act of ingratitude to a host who had given him shelter in time of danger was that the church and parsonage were built by "public act," and therefore should belong to the religion of the governor. The confiscation was carried out legally through an order served on the minister by the sheriff. The Presbyterians, having failed to regain their property by force, were still suing to get it back legally at the end of Cornbury's rule. It was not until 1728, twenty years after Cornbury's dismissal, that the church and parsonage were returned by the courts to the Presbyterians.

Another act of generosity to the Church of England caused more trouble for Cornbury. One of the most valuable properties in New York was the estate known as "The Queen's Farm and Garden," sixty-two acres of choice land between Broadway and the Hudson River. Queen Anne was a passionate Protestant, whose principal interest in life was the church. It was easy for Cornbury to persuade her to grant her farm by letters patent to the Corporation of Trinity Church.

The non-Episcopalians, Dutch and French Protestants, by far the majority of her subjects in New York, complained bitterly to the Queen over the transfer of the Crown property to a rival, minority, religious group. The Queen was sympathetic to other Protestant religions, and her second interest in life, after the church, was money. She would not have been pleased to hear from her advisers that Cornbury's action meant a reduction, however minor, in her revenues from the colony.

In 1708, the same year that she dismissed Cornbury as governor, the Queen repealed her letters of patent to the Corporation of Trinity Church and took back possession of the royal property.

In his six years as governor, Cornbury had carried out an administration that was successful in many ways. He kept harmony among the colonists of varying races, religions and national origins. In a world at war, New York remained at peace. Cornbury's government established the first free grammar school in America.

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There was much of which he could be proud, but he never learned how to get along with the colonists. It probably could not be done. Contemporary American chroniclers unanimously consigned him to a place in history as "New York's worst governor."

After the Queen dismissed him, more than two months passed before the Lords of Trade implemented her decision. Even then, they did not change their policy that gave the power of the purse to the colonists, and put the governor in the impossible position of having to beg for his salary from the governed. The commissioners issued instructions to Lord Lovelace May 31, 1708, to govern New York "to the same purpose" as Lord Cornbury.

Five months more passed before Lovelace sailed for New York. The slow transfer of powers could be explained by the fact that the War of Spanish Succession was raging on land throughout Europe and at sea in the Atlantic. Most ships sailed in convoys, which took a long time to form.

Since no fundamental change was involved, there was no compulsion or desire on the part of the Lords in London to rush a new governor to New York, merely to satisfy the unruly colonists.

Lovelace finally sailed from England in mid-October aboard the *Kingsale*, accompanied by a number of other ships. They went through a hideous, nine-week nightmare at sea, culminating in a winter storm that scattered the convoy in all directions. The *Kingsale*, separated from its companion vessels, took refuge in Buzzard's Bay, off the southern shore of Massachusetts. After the storm subsided, the ship sailed through Long Island Sound toward New York, but blocks of floating ice forced the *Kingsale* to dock at Flushing on Long Island. Lovelace and his party traveled overland to Brooklyn and crossed the East River by ferry to Manhattan. They arrived December 18, 1708. Lovelace and two of his sons had colds from which they never recovered.

Cornbury, whatever his virtues or vices, was a true Englishman. He accepted the decision of his Queen to remove him without a whimper. He received his successor with grace and as much elegance as one could muster in a moldy Colonial mansion.

On the evening of Lovelace's arrival, Cornbury and the members of the council offered him a banquet in the mansion. The new governor was in no condition to attend a party, and excused himself, but Cornbury went ahead with it anyway.

By now, the mansion and the fort were in an advanced state of decay. The earthen parapets had collapsed into mounds of sod under the weight of the pigs that used the fortifications as a pasture. Most of the gun carriages and their platforms were rotted. The guns were dismantled and rusted. The troops, reduced to a strength of seventy from their original 400 in four foot companies, were without decent uniforms.

The kitchen of the mansion, lacking the guidance of a mistress of the house, was no longer capable of providing a banquet. Cornbury called in a caterer, Henry Swift, who served food and drink to the amount of £46, 7 shillings and 6 pence, the equivalent of a week's salary for the governor. More than three years later, in February, 1712, Swift's records still carried the bill as unpaid.

Cornbury, puzzled and hurt by his removal as governor despite his outwardly unperturbed appearance, stayed on in New York in reduced circumstances, waiting for the ships to come in from England with some news of what his future might hold.

The Bretts, passing the winter in the wilderness, were aware of his predicament. The river stayed open until late January, and Roger sent a note of condolence down to Cornbury dated December 9, 1709, before Lovelace's arrival:

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"Sir: Yours of the 9th of the last came safe to my hands, for which I return you thanks. I would have sent an answer sooner, but I can't find one master of a sloop that will undertake to deliver a letter.

"There is noe news of the fleet, and by what I hear from other parts I believe we shall see noe fleet this year, nor do I yet know what our people here will resolve upon. Have not heard one word from England since my Lord Lovelace's arrival.

"I hope my daughter is arrived there safe by this time. I am glad she did not go with the last fleet, for Captain Riddle who commanded the Falmouth in which she must have gone was attacked by a French man-of-war of seventy guns who boarded him, but Riddle got clear of him and got safe into Plimouth with all his fleet.

"We have noe news to entertain you with: as soon as I have any you shall have it; I am sorry to hear Mrs. Brett has not been well.

"I was in hopes before this time, I should have seen you or Mrs. Brett here, where with my short commons you will always find a most hearty welcome. I entreat you to give my humble service to Mrs. Brett and do me justice to believe that I am Sir;

Your humble servant, CORNBURY"

Catharyna Brett was pregnant that winter, but not seriously ill. She and Roger were comfortable in their temporary quarters, and they were busy coping with the problems of their first winter in the country and planning to start construction of a permanent home in the Spring.

While Cornbury languished in New York, lonesome, resentful of his "short commons," uncertain of his future and longing for news from home, Lovelace began his administration of the province. His government was to last little more than four months. Brief as it was, it became one of the most significant in Colonial history, as future historians were to discern in this time and place the seeds of the American Revolution.

In the spring of 1709, sixty-four years before the Boston Tea Party and sixty-seven years before the shot was fired at Lexington, the New York Assembly joined with the governor the battle of the budget that was to end with the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Lovelace approached the assembly in a conciliatory way. He was a career soldier, but he preferred persuasion to force, and he was personally a kind, likeable man who enjoyed getting along with his colleagues. He offered to pay taxes on his salary. But he made the fundamental mistake of demanding that the Assembly grant him a fixed sum of money, for a long period of time, to carry out his administration.

The previous budget had been adopted by the Assembly in 1702 for a period of seven years. It was now expiring, and the representatives were determined that future appropriations should be made from year to year, for specific purposes.

Lovelace told them, "I can not in the least doubt, gentlemen, but that you will raise the same revenue for the same term of years, for the support of the government, as was raised by Act of Assembly in the 11th year of the reign of the late King William of glorious memory."

But Lovelace was wrong. The members of the Assembly felt that, by conferring a fixed, long-term sum on the governor, they would be levying a tax on themselves,

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rather than appropriating funds for specific expenditures, and they would be surrendering the power of the purse. This, they refused to do, and they rejected Lovelace's requests for anything more than an annual appropriation.

Lovelace was not physically equal to the struggle with the Assembly. For four months, he had been unable to shake off the shock of his Atlantic crossing. Just when the Assembly convened in April, 1709, one of the governor's sons, Wentworth, died. Another, John, was dying. On May 6, 1709, Lord Lovelace succumbed to pneumonia. In July, seven months after she arrived in America with her husband and three sons, Lady Charlotte sailed back to England with her one remaining son, Nevil.

Still, Cornbury stayed in New York, and now another humiliation was in store for him. Upon the death of Lovelace, Colonel Peter Schuyler, president of the council, became acting governor. Schuyler was one of the most distinguished citizens of the province, but his interests were up the river. He was the first mayor of Albany and a friend of the Mohawk Indians. He had been a member of Cornbury's council, and now, while the former governor was still standing by idle in the colony, the former councilor took his place at the head of the government.

Cornbury still waited wistfully for news from home, and his health began to fail. On October 4, 1709, he wrote to Roger Brett:

"Sir: -- The nurse telling me that a boat was going to You I was not willing to omit the opportunity of writing you, though we have noe news here, only of a great battle in Flanders, where my Lord Marlborough has attained a great victory. I expect to hear every day of the arrival of the Virginia Fleet by which I hope to have news of England. In the meantime, I wish you and Mrs. Brett all the health, happiness and satisfaction of a merry Christmas and a happy New Year and am Sir;

Your most Humble servant, CORNBURY
"My Service to Mrs. Brett."

His report of a victory in Flanders was an apparent reference to the battle of Malplaquet which was fought September 11, 1709. It was a technical victory for John Churchill, First Duke of Marborough, who had overcome the French in a series of encounters, and, in this case, forced them from the field of battle.

That Cornbury should have known of the battle so soon -- little more than three weeks after the fighting -- was evidence of how fast news could travel in those days of no radio, no telephone, no telegraph and no cable. Couriers riding horseback and sailing swift ships, capable of travel without benefit of convoy, carried the news of important events quickly to all corners of the British empire. Fortunes were made or lost and fates determined by early knowledge of the fluctuations of dynasties or the vagaries of war.

The War of Spanish Succession, then raging, involved the colonists of America only vaguely as a conflict between the mother country and her enemies, far away in Europe. They called it Queen Anne's War. Since 1701, the British and their Dutch allies had been fighting the French and the Spaniards for the throne of Spain, left vacant after the death in 1700 of childless Charles II. The war would end in 1713 with the Treaty of Utrecht, leaving the Spanish throne to the Bourbon King Philip V, but depriving him of his possessions in the Netherlands.

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The Battle of Malplaquet seemed at the time like a momentous development. The Duke of Marlborough, Captain General of the Queen's forces, had been pursuing the French south through the Low Countries. He captured Tournai, Belgium, after a terrible two-month siege, and caught up with the French again September 11, 1709, at Malplaquet in northern France. The French withdrew after a sharp clash, and the British went on to capture Mons on October 20. The campaign was generally regarded as a triumph for Marlborough.

But at Malplaquet, he had suffered 20,000 casualties, about twice as many as the French, who retreated in good order, leaving few prisoners. The territory Marlborough took proved to be of little importance, and his Tory opponents at home seized upon his losses as reason to turn the Queen against him and eventually to deprive him of all his powers in 1711.

In 1709, the bare news of Marlborough's "victory" was enough to encourage the despondent Cornbury and prompt him to relay the information to his young friend up the Hudson.

Other kinds of news could be painfully slow in those days, both in the making and in the transmission. Royal bureaucrats could take an eternity to reach decisions, and they could be incredibly inefficient in issuing orders. For Cornbury, this was an agonizing period of "noe news...noe news...noe news." He was dependent on two sets of tormentors, the General Assembly in New York and the royal court in London. He needed an appropriation from one or an appointment from the other. He still did not know "what our people here will resolve upon," meaning the colonists. And he still had not heard "one word from England."

Month after month, he languished in limbo, without an income, his debts piled up. His creditors hovered around the governor's mansion. Tradesmen pressed their bills on him. Finally Cornbury was subjected to the ultimate humiliation. He was arrested and lodged in debtors' prison in an unheated room of rough board on the second floor of City Hall.

This seemingly cavalier treatment of a former governor was not unusual. Lady Bellomont, widow of Cornbury's predecessor as governor, had been forced to post £10,000 bail before she was permitted to leave the colony. Lady Lovelace, widow of Cornbury's successor, complained to the Lords of Trade, after her return to England, that she had escaped prison in New York only by stealing aboard ship at night with the papers and personal possessions that the colonists were demanding of her.

Cornbury was treated well in prison. There was even a plot in the Sheriff's office to permit him to escape. But his creditors caught wind of that and kept their own watch.

Several acting governors were inclined to help Cornbury. Colonel Schuyler, the first in charge after Lovelace, gave up the office and went home to Albany. He was followed as acting governor by Richard Ingoldesby, who had been lieutenant governor under Cornbury. But Ingoldesby was having his own troubles with the law, under charges of making illegal grants of land to himself and his friends. He was dismissed by the Queen.

Finally, Gerardus Beekman, senior member of the council, became acting governor until the new governor, Robert Hunter, arrived in New York June 14, 1710. By then, Cornbury had received his long-awaited news from England.

When it came, it was the news that his father, the Earl of Clarendon, was dead. Cornbury inherited the title and enough money to pay his bills and get himself out of prison. He returned to London late in 1709 to take his seat in the House of Lords. He

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had fourteen more years of life, in which to forget New York, before his death April 1, 1723, at the age of sixty-two.

There was no record left that Cornbury ever communicated with the Bretts about his final indignities in New York. His last known letter to them was the note of October 4, 1709, wishing them a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

His wish was fulfilled, for the Bretts moved into their permanent home at Fishkill Landing in time for Christmas Day, 1709.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

It started as a small house that eventually grew to a rambling homestead. The original building had only four rooms on the ground floor, a kitchen in the cellar and an unfinished second floor. The foundations were of field stone, the beams of timber from the forest and the shingles of cedar, cut by hand and fixed by hand-wrought nails. The structure was simple but graceful and sturdy, even though it was hardly an original feat of engineering.¹³

At the very time that the Bretts were building their little house, the Duke of Marlborough was having Blenheim Palace erected in Oxfordshire, England. This colossal structure, which took twenty years to building, between 1705 and 1725, had two hundred rooms and covered seven acres -- all to provide a monument to Marlborough's victory over the French and the Bavarians in 1704 at Blenheim, Germany.

The Bretts put up their four-room house during the single year 1709. It was still a cozy place long after Blenheim Palace became a tourist attraction. But before Roger Brett could proceed with the construction, he still had financial transactions to carry out in New York City to provide cash for the building.

While Catharyna stayed with the two children, Thomas, three, and Francis, one year old, and expecting the third, in the temporary residence at the riverside near the mill, Roger went down the river during the winter of 1708-09. It was not an especially mild winter. So fierce were the December storms that the sailing vessel, *Kinsale*, bringing Lord Lovelace from England, had been forced to lay off the coast for days. Despite the wintry winds and the ice floes, Roger was able to make his way to New York in January. Without going to see Lord Cornbury, who was writing to him at the same time, Brett called on some of his more affluent friends for assistance.

First, he obtained a large loan from Captain Giles Shelly, a ship's master, who could certainly afford it. Shelly had recently completed one of the most profitable voyages in the history of the colony.

At the helm of the ship *Nassau*, Shelly had sailed out of New York in July 1696, carrying a cargo of Jamaica rum, Madeira wine and gunpowder to the island of Madagascar, the pirate stronghold in the Indian Ocean off the East coast of Africa. After selling his freight to the freebooters, he returned with a cargo of jewels, silks, and spices from the East Indies, and with twenty-nine pirates, traveling as paying passengers. Shelly's voyage netted the *Nassau's* owners £30,000.

From his commission, Shelly had no difficulty in lending the Bretts £399, six pence. They gave him their joint written bond for that amount on January 10, 1709. It was almost twice as much as the Bretts had received for the mortgage on their handsome stone house in the city. It was enough to permit Roger to buy the material and hire the men to start building his house.

In the spring, after the ice left the river, Roger went down to New York again. This time, he called on William Peartree, a neighbor of the Rombouts, another former mayor of New York and a prosperous merchant.

Peartree had been a sailor and then an officer in the English merchant marine. He settled at Jamaica, in the West Indies, made a fortune in coastal trade, and moved to

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New York in 1700. He set up a fine house and office, surrounded by a garden, in Beaver Street. He served as mayor from 1703 to 1706, and took a new house on Broadway, across the street from the Rombouts.

The Bretts obtained from Peartree the sum of £200 in exchange for a mortgage on their first house, the mill, and some of their land in Dutchess County.

The Clerk of Dutchess County recorded the transaction thus:

“On April 9, 1709, Roger Brett and wife, Catharyna, daughter and sole heir of Francis Rombout, late of the City of New York, deceased, mortgaged to William Peartree of the City of New York, for £200, all that messuage or tenement and 300 acres of land, lying and being in Dutchess County on the East side of Hudson’s river just above the highlands, and also that grist mill standing and being near unto said messuage or tenement and with the same used and occupied; all which premises are on the North side of a certain creek called Fishkill.”

Peartree had little, if any interest in a clearing in the woods of Dutchess County. He was engrossed in much larger undertakings in New York. With other shipping merchants, he had fitted out an expedition of three small warships to stop the depredations of a French privateer cruising outside New York harbor. He was instrumental in establishing the first free grammar school for children of the citizens of New York, and he had helped to set up an elementary school for Negro slaves.

There was no indication that Peartree ever went up the Hudson to inspect the property. A year later, the Bretts paid off the mortgage. In the meantime, they had the cash to complete their new house.

The place they picked for their permanent home was one of those masterpieces of nature – near the crest of a pleasant knoll, about a mile back into the woods, facing southwest toward the river and the creek, exposed to the sun, sheltered from the wind and suffused with the fragrances of the virgin forest. Like a rough gem, extracted from the earth, the lot had to be cleaned and cut and polished. When the clearing was completed, the place sparkled with the brilliance of a beautiful jewel.

There, the Bretts built a prototype of what was to become known as a “Dutch” house in the Hudson valley. In reality, it was not Dutch, but an early American house, and even more narrowly defined, a Dutchess County house, constructed of the materials that were available locally and adapted to the local conditions.

More than two centuries after the Bretts built their house, the incomparable Dutchess County historian Helen Wilkinson Reynolds published in 1928 a book titled, *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley before 1776*. The Brett house was listed first in the county.

Franklin D. Roosevelt of Hyde Park, Dutchess County, New York, who was to move five years later to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D. C., served as chairman of a special committee of The Holland Society of New York to sponsor the book. In an introduction, he wrote:

“We are prone to think of our forebears as living ideal lives of rural comfort in large houses of many rooms, with high ceilings and abundantly furnished.” To the contrary, he noted, “the mode of life of the first settlers of New Netherland, and of their immediate

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descendants, was extremely simple, a statement which is true not only of the smaller landowners, but of many of the patentees of large grants."

"From high to low, their lives were the lives of pioneers, lives of hardship, of privation and often of danger," Roosevelt wrote. "Roads were few and rough, household belongings modest, and the dwelling that contained more than four rooms was an exception.

"I have been impressed also by a thought that comes from consideration of the sites of these houses. In the choice of their locations the houses seem to represent a point of view on the part of their builders unlike that held in some other parts of the country, one with less of the community and village influence that is evident in New England, and more of individual independence for so often these houses of the Hudson valley are found in cozy places, back from the highway, down below a hill, far from a neighbor, snuggling as it were into a perfect landscape-setting and happy in their isolation."



Madam Brett Homestead, Van Nydeck Ave., Beacon, built some time between 1709 and 1714 by Roger and Catharyna Brett. It is the oldest standing house in Dutchess County. Brett descendants lived here for more than two centuries. Threatened with demolition in the 1950's, it was saved by Meizingah Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, which raised funds in 1954 to buy it from Robert Fulton Cray, Jr., a direct Brett descendant. The D.A.R. continues to preserve and maintain the house as a historic site open to the public. (Photo courtesy Alexander Casler and Dutchess County Dept. of History)

Some of the later occupants of the Brett house professed to be puzzled by the choice of the location, so far away from the river. They complained also about the lack of a picture-window view of the scenic surroundings. But they were always willing to

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concede facetiously that it was easier to walk from the location to the post office of the city of Beacon that grew up around the house, than it would have been from the river bank.

The future president of the United State had an instinctive understanding of the condition and the philosophy of the original settlers of his county. He knew it was more important to be warm and out of the wind that sweeps up the Hudson than to have a view.

Miss Reynolds, in the preface to her book, pointed out that

"the people of the Hudson valley, of whatever European extraction: Dutch, English, French, Teutonic, Scandinavian, -- all built alike."

"The average house of the period before the Revolution was, however, more nearly the result of the actual time and place of its erection, and in the last analysis the severity of the winters in the Hudson valley and the forms of land-tenure that existed there were the influences that governed building," she wrote.

Miss Reynolds concluded,

"Assuming that the occupation of a house by people Dutch descent creates what may be called a Dutch home, the house of Madam Brett is preponderantly Dutch in character."



The kitchen fireplace in the Madam Brett Homestead, ca. 1709. (Photo courtesy Melzingah Chapter, D.A.R.)

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It was, essentially, a simple two-story frame house, imbued with the personality of its first mistress.



This seventeenth century floor clock in the hallway of the Brett house belonged to Francis Rombout. The clockmaker's name on the face is Pieter Klock, Amsterdam. (Photo courtesy Melzingah Chapter, D.A.R.)

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The main entrance went through a wooden door in the middle of the wide south wall into the cellar. The door was held fast by a hand-carved latch. Through a hole in the door hung a string that lifted the latch at a light touch and opened the door. The latching was always out -- a symbol of hospitality."

The cellar formed a single room, a combination kitchen and dining room, 75 feet by 45 feet, and six feet high, with walls two feet thick, made of fieldstone faced with red brick. Young trees, some crooked and still showing the scars of the axe but strong, provided cellar posts eight by twelve inches. On the east side was a wide fireplace, tall enough for a man to stand in, the men being somewhat shorter in these days. At the rear, a steep staircase led up to the ground floor.

The main floor was divided by a center hall from north to south, flanked by two rooms on each side, the two on the south side being slightly larger than those on the north. The southeast room served as the principal bedroom, with a niche on each side of the chimney for beds. The southwest room was the parlor.

The northwest room was used for spinning and other household chores, when it was not occupied by beds. The northeast room was a smaller bedroom. A staircase at the northwest end of the hall went up to the unfinished attic where the servants slept.

The water came from a well outside the cellar door that could be pumped in the yard or reached through a window. There were no pipes and no other conveniences.

As the house neared completion, the Bretts brought the furnishings up by sloop from New York. Hinges and other fixtures of iron were obtained from the ship-building yards on the East River. The furniture came from the Broadway house.

The prize piece was the Dutch chest (*kas*), made of ebony and rosewood, that Catharyna's father had brought over a half-century before from Belgium. This was put in a place of honor in a corner of the parlor. The rooms were filled soon with tables, chairs and beds, fashioned in primitive style from native wood.

A lot of furniture was needed, for by now the family had reached the customary ample proportions of a Dutch household. In addition to Roger and Catharyna, there were three servants -- actually slaves -- one of them being Brett's manservant, Samuel, another being a personal maid to Catharyna.

And most of all for the moment, at least, a third son. While the house was under construction, Robert was born in 1709, joining Thomas, four years old and Francis, two. That year, the Bretts celebrated their first Christmas in the new house, tight and warm against the winds and stocked for the siege of winter, that was to be home to them for the rest of their lives and to their descendants for centuries.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

As different as night and day, black and white, old and young, sweet and sour, there were two forms of land tenure in the Hudson valley early in the eighteenth century - good and bad. The good way was by freehold. The bad was by lease. Roger Brett began by leasing his land to poor tenant farmers. Catharyna Brett eventually sold her property to proud landowners.

In finding her destiny as a real estate dealer, she had several advantages: she was soon to acquire as partner, mentor and friend the man who was probably the most astute financial operator in the province. She had good land to sell - fertile, readily accessible and easily cleared. And her title to the land was conducive to commercial transactions.

The time would come when she would develop her land with all the zeal of a twentieth century promoter of real estate, but before that could happen, some class prejudices had to be overcome and feudal practices abandoned.

Catharyna Brett's title to the land derived from the Indian deed of sale, recorded for her father on August 14, 1683, and the royal patent granted to her father and his partners on October 17, 1685. The patent constituted simply confirmation by the provincial government that the land belonged to the purchasers and "their heirs and assignees forever." The property was acquired as a business venture, and there was a natural inclination to dispose of it with the same incentive - profit, and cash in hand.

The situation was quite different in the neighboring counties. While all of the land in Dutchess County was held by patent, there were nine manors in other counties along the Hudson - six in Westchester to the south, one in Ulster to the west and two in Albany to the north. Title to the manors was granted by royal charter, making the owner a Lord and giving him the right to rule over the tenants. The Lord of the Manor was inclined to lease his land and to retain the title of ownership.

The manor system had its explanation, if not its justification. It began as a device to encourage population of the wilderness and to attract capital from the city to the countryside. The lordship was granted, not as a reward or privilege, but as an opportunity for men of means to invest in the land and to establish farms.

It did not work well. At the start of the eighteenth century, Governor Bellomont reported to the Lords of Trade in London that development of the manors was slowed by the leasehold system - there were only about twenty families living on the great Philipse manor of Westchester County and four or five on the Livingston's manor of Albany.

The leasehold system discouraged men of ambition, who could never hope to own the land they cultivated, and the manor created social distinctions that were repugnant to men of independent spirit. The Lord was a Court Baron who settled disputes, tried legal cases and punished offenses. In church, he occupied a canopied pew while the tenants sat on straight, rough, wooden benches.

The tenant paid little rent, and that often in kind rather than cash. But the houses and barns he built, the fields he cleared and the orchards he planted all belonged to the Lord of the Manor. It did not take long for history to show that landlordism could never coexist side by side with peasant proprietorship, and the position of the Lords of the

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Manor was doomed by the spirit of independence of their land-owning neighbors.

The patent, like the one inherited by Catharyna Brett, was given for specific commercial purposes. Francis Rombout obtained his patent as a base for fur trading and the lumber business. The Rombout partners never carried out their purpose. Gulian Verplanck died in 1684, a year before the patent was issued. Rombout died in 1691, six years after getting the patent. Stephanus Van Cortlandt lived on to 1700. They left no record of having purchased any pelts or extracted any lumber from Dutchess County. If they did any business with the Indians, it was small.

Several descendants of Gulian Verplanck came to live in Dutchess County. They established an estate called Mount Gulian, on the Hudson north of the Bretts, but they did little to develop their land, and they disposed of it only by lease.

The Van Cortlandts, owning a manor to the south, never occupied their property in Dutchess County. Stephanus Van Cortlandt had been acquiring land in Westchester County since 1683, at the same time that he joined in the purchase of the Rombout Patent, and he obtained a royal charter from King William III in 1697, creating the manor of Cortlandt and giving "Lords of Cortlandt the extraordinary privilege of sending a representative to the provincial Assembly."

The Van Cortlandts concentrated their attention on their Manor House at Croton-on-Hudson, which was to become a gathering place for Colonial society and eventually part of the Sleepy Hollow Restoration. Stephanus' heirs eventually sold their land in Dutchess County, leaving no impact there.

It was only natural for Roger Brett to follow the same course as his friends and neighbors, leasing the land. Like the Lords of the Manor, his development went slowly. In the years 1708 to 1713, he had acquired his six original tenants—John Terboss with 180 acres, Thomas Brasier with 100, Casper Prince 100, Peter Du Bois 80, John Bois 80 and Julien Springsten 60. But the first census of Dutchess County, taken in 1714, showed that while Terboss, Du Bois, Bois and Springsten still lived there, Brasier and Prince had gone.

After the Clerk of Dutchess County began to record deeds for land in 1718, the List of Deeds indicated that Roger Brett brought only two more families to Rombout Patent as tenants.

In October 1715, Roger Brett of the Fishkills, and Catharyna, his wife, recorded a grant to Robert Dengee, carpenter of Hempstead on Long Island. In consideration of "one year's work by grantee for grantors," the Bretts agreed "to convey title to 100 acres of land at expiration of said year of work."

To this deed was appended a clause June 30, 1716, describing the land as a "parcel of 110 acres on the east side of Hudson's river on the north side of the Highlands and on the north side of the first landing place beyond Peter Du Bois." Obviously, Dengee had done good work for the Bretts and had earned a bonus of ten acres of land.

The quit-rent for Dengee's lease was "four good fatt ground fowles every year at Christmas." The witnesses to his deed were John Terboss and a John Jones.

The only other deed recorded by Roger Brett with Catharyna was on May 25, 1718, to Richard Townsend of Hempstead, Queens County, New York. In consideration of "a sum of money," and for a quit-rent of "three couple of good fowles, yearly," the Bretts granted Townsend a "parcel of 500 acres on the east side of Hudson's river, northward of ye Highlands, within the bounds of land now in the possession of grantors."

The witnesses were Robert Dengee and a John Beatty.

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At this rate, obviously, Brett would soon be in need of more cash. Unlike the Lords of Manor, who owned ships and engaged in commerce to supplement their meager incomes from the land, Brett had no other source of revenue except the grist mill, and his customers there, poor farmers and Indians, paid for their meal more often in kind than in cash. Brett turned once more to a money-lender.

On April 7, 1713, Roger and Catharyna Brett gave to George Clarke of New York City, secretary of the province, a mortgage on "the southernmost part" of their land in Dutchess County for the sum of £700. Out of the lot, offered free of claim as security for the mortgage, the Bretts reserved the parcels of land occupied by Terboss, Brasier, Prince, Du Bois, Bois, and Springsten. The mill and the original "messuage," or dwelling also were excluded. The mortgage apparently covered all the Bretts' land along Fishkill Creek, running through the southern end of their property. For more than twenty years, until the transaction was "canceled" on November 14, 1734, Clarke continued to hold his mortgage on much of the Brett share of the Rombout patent.

This was Roger's biggest deal. The £700 he received for the mortgage to Clarke compared to £400 he obtained as a loan from Captain Shelly, £240 from James Emott for the mortgage on the Broadway house and £200 from William Peartree for the mortgage on the original house, mill, and 300 acres in Dutchess County. The deal made Catharyna Brett a partner of George Clarke.

The Bretts could not have found a better man for a business associate. Clarke, an English lawyer, had come to New York in 1703, ten years before the start of his association with the Bretts. When he arrived, he bore a royal commission as secretary of the province, his only title when he advanced the £700 to the Bretts. Two years later, in 1715, he was appointed a member of the governor's council. Three years after that, in 1718, he was named deputy auditor of the province.

In the way that fate has of involving the lives of little people in great events, the affairs of the Bretts, through Clarke, became entangled with the loftiest political intrigues at the court in London.

Back in London, the man holding the post of auditor of the province of New York was Horace Walpole, brother of Sir Robert Walpole, who was then conspiring to take control of the entire British government. Horace Walpole picked Clarke as his deputy and, in effect, as his controller of revenues in New York.

It was Clarke's assignment to collect a five per cent commission on all income raised by the provincial government, to be paid to the London auditor. This official larceny was stoutly opposed by the colonists, ever jealous of their money. The Assembly directed the treasurer of the province to account only to the governor, his council, and the assembly, leaving Clarke out in the cold.

Clarke encountered more trouble when William Burnet arrived as the new governor in 1720. While Clarke was corresponding with Horace Walpole, Burnet depended for his political support on the Duke of Newcastle, a rival of the Walpoles. Burnet did nothing to help Clarke collect his commission.

Within a year, however, Sir Robert Walpole emerged as the unchallenged political leader in London. In 1721, he became First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer under King George I, who had succeeded Queen Anne in 1714. Although Sir Robert never took the title of Prime Minister, he was the first Englishman to occupy that position in the modern sense of the First Minister. For twenty years, he dominated the British cabinet, Parliament, court, and people. In 1724, he magnanimously named his former opponent, the Duke of Newcastle, as a secretary of state.

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The cause for friction between their agents in New York was removed. Burnet, the governor, became a friend of the deputy auditor, Clarke, and helped him to collect £2,500 in commissions, both on current revenues of the province and on arrears.

Clarke, the Bretts' benefactor, became a pervasive force in the province, active in everything from land speculation to slave trading and liquor sales – all legal and lucrative.

Before taking his mortgage on the Rombout patent, Clarke was already a land owner in Dutchess County. He was one of the "Little Nine Partners," who obtained a patent on April 10, 1706, on the northernmost region of the county. The name referred not to the personal size of the partners, but to the extent of their land, which was considerably smaller than the "Great Nine Partners" patent, issued in 1697, just to the south of them between the "Little Nine Partners" and the Rombout patents. One of the "Great Nine Partners" was James Emott, holder of the mortgage on the Bretts' Broadway house.

The slave trade was considered perfectly proper and personal relations between blacks and whites were usually friendly. But Clarke became involved in one transaction that ended as a nuisance. In 1723, a Dr. Dupuy sold to Clarke for £55 a "negro wench," nineteen years old, whom Dupuy had brought up from infancy. Dupuy gave fair warning that the girl did not want to be sold, but he sent her to Clarke "on approval."

"She will pretend not to know anything, but she must not be believed," Dupuy informed Clarke.

Clarke accepted the reluctant slave, but three years later he took an advertisement in a newspaper, offering to sell a black woman "as she has a great itch for running away."

Clarke figured also in the liquor business. In 1726, he was recorded as owing £13, ten shillings for "half a pipe of wine." With the wine valued at two shillings, nine pence a gallon, that meant that he had purchased about ninety gallons of wine – a lot of alcohol, even in a hard-drinking colony, and not all meant for home consumption.

Burnet, Clarke's new-found ally, proved to be the most popular governor ever to rule the province. In contrast to his predecessors, the colonists found him kind, likeable and, much to their surprise, absolutely honest. Although he helped Clarke to collect commissions, under orders from London, he never took a shilling for himself.

Burnet came to the colony in personal financial difficulties, a casualty of the bursting of the famous South Sea bubble. The South Sea Company, a joint stock concern, had obtained a monopoly on British trade with South America. In anticipation of immense profits, the stock soared in a frenzy of speculation. But the profits failed to materialize, the company collapsed in 1720 and hundreds of investors were ruined.

Burnet was among the investors. He was serving then as comptroller-general of customs in England, at a salary of £1,200 a year. Needing cash, he gladly accepted the appointment as governor of New York, at an anticipated £2,000 a year.

Burnet, thirty-two, was young for the post. He came from a distinguished family. His father, Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, had helped to bring William and Mary to the throne. The new governor, a widower, brought with him one son, Gilbert, named for his grandfather. The aristocratic British governor fell in love with Anna Maria Van Horne, nineteen, daughter of Abraham Van Horne, a wealthy New York merchant of old Dutch stock. The romance, culminating in marriage, contributed to Burnet's popularity among the people.

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William Smith, the contemporary historian who had been so bitter about Lord Cornbury, praised Burnet highly: "We never had a governor to whom the colony is so much indebted."

"The excessive love of money, a disease common to all his predecessors, and to some who succeeded him, was a vice from which he was entirely free," Smith wrote in his history of the province.

"He sold no offices, nor attempted to raise a fortune by indirect means; for he lived generously, and carried scarce anything away with him, but his books."

If Lord Cornbury was the worst governor New York ever had, Burnet was probably the best. He stayed on as governor from 1720 to 1728.

For many years after that, Clarke remained a power in the province. He grew a handsome family, and bought his wife blue, purple, and green silk stockings. He became a leader of society, one of the first to have a spinet in his home. Finally, he governed the colony in his own right for seven years, from 1736 to 1743, although only with the rank of lieutenant-governor.

In earlier days, while Clarke was still struggling as deputy auditor, Catharyna Brett suddenly had desperate need of his assistance.

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CHAPTER NINE

The Bretts never feared the river. Catharyna, as a child, played on its bank. She grew up on the shore of the broad stream flowing past her father's orchard into New York Bay. After her marriage, she made her first home upstream on the point where the Hudson passed the mouth of Fishkill Creek. The homestead where she spent the rest of her life was built on a hill back from the river, nestled deep in the bosom of the Hudson Valley.

Her husband, Roger, scion of a sea-faring English family, a professional sailor and officer of the Royal Navy, spent much of his life on ships. Being accustomed to the waves of wide oceans, viewed from the decks of warships, it was easy sport for him to skipper his own smart little sloop back and forth over the usually smooth surface of the Hudson.

Roger served as master of his sloop. He did the sailing himself. For crew, he had his manservant, Samuel, who helped him handle the sails and sometimes held the rudder, or who took care of the cargo stacked on the deck and kept the cabin tidy.

Catharyna, a young wife in her twenties, accompanied Roger frequently on his trips. The cabin of the sloop was comfortable, and the river was a friendly place, crowded with sailboats, ferries, rowboats, canoes, scows, barges, rafts, dugouts called pirogues, hollowed from tree trunks, and clippers, known as battoes or skipjacks, broad-sterned sailing vessels.

The river was the colonial counterpart of a modern metropolitan highway on a summer Sunday afternoon, but better. The boats glided past each other in graceful curves, without congestion. The air was sweet and clear, free of pollution. The sailors and rowers and paddlers all called to one another in friendly greetings.

So safe did Catharyna feel on the river that she did not hesitate to embark on one trip when she was pregnant, almost to the point of childbirth. It was in 1712. Catharyna was twenty-five years old, and the Bretts had been living in Dutchess County for four years. On that trip, their fourth and last son was born aboard the sloop.

So great was the affection, so close the affinity the Bretts felt for the Hudson that they named the boy Rivery. He joined his brothers Thomas, then seven, Francis, five, and Robert, three.

In history and in fiction, the Hudson has always fared well, with the reputation of a mighty, but beautiful stream. "Una grandissima riviera," it was called by Giovanni Verrazzano, the Italian explorer who sailed into New York harbor in 1524, the first European known with historical certainty to have seen the Hudson.

Verrazzano reported, "We found a very agreeable situation located within two small prominent hills, in the midst of which flowed to the sea a very great river, which was deep within the mouth." But Verrazzano did not dare to venture up the river "without knowledge of the entrances."

Going ashore, he soon saw the sometimes sinister side of the Hudson. "In an instant, as is wont to happen in navigation," he wrote, "a gale of unfavorable wind blowing in from the sea, we were forced to return to the ship, leaving the said land with much regret because of its commodiousness and beauty."

Henry Hudson, who came along in 1609 and was the first European to navigate the

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Hudson, admired the valley. "It is as pleasant a land as one need tread upon," he reported, and "as fine a river as can be found."

Robert Juet of Limehouse, a seaman who kept a journal of Hudson's journey, was impressed favorably at first by the natives. Traveling upstream through the highlands, just below Fishkill Creek, he wrote, "There we found very loving people, and very old men: Where we were well-used."

The Indians brought gifts to the *Half Moon* of food and furs — oysters and grapes, beaver and otter. But the harmony ended when an Indian climbed from his canoe up the ship's rudder to Juet's cabin, and stole a pillow, two shirts, and two bandoleers. The white men killed the thief and recovered the loot, then they had to fight their way back down the Hudson.

In the literature of the Colonial province of New York, the Hudson was an ever-present, all-pervasive force, usually benevolent, often mystic, sometimes malevolent. Washington Irving was duly respectful, even reverent in his approach to the river.

In *The Sketch-Book*, Irving depicted Rip Van Winkle resting on a green knoll in the Catskill Mountains, while hunting squirrels. "He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, with the reflection of a purple cloud, or the sail of a lagging bark, here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands."

But Irving recognized the fickle nature of the Hudson Valley weather and the foul turns it could take. In a postscript to the story of Rip Van Winkle, Irving wrote that, according to the Indians, there was "an old squaw spirit who dispensed the weather."

"If displeased, she would brew up clouds black as ink, sitting in the midst of them like a bottle-bellied spider in the midst of its web; and when these clouds broke, woe betide the valleys."

On other occasions, Irving attributed the tricky weather variously to "supernatural and mischievous beings" which delighted in plaguing Dutch skippers, or to "evil spirits conjured up by the Indian wizards" to take revenge on "the strangers who had dispossessed them of their country," or to "a little bulbous-bottomed Dutch goblin, in trunk hose and sugar-loafed hat, with a speaking trumpet in his hand," who was capable of "piping up of a fresh gust of wind, or the rattling off of another thunder-clap," and who was accompanied at times by "a crew of little imps, in broad breeches and short doublets, tumbling head over heel in the rack and mist, and playing a thousand gambols in the air."

Whatever the cause — and there were perfectly natural meteorological phenomena to account for the sudden storms, the black clouds laced with sulphurous yellow mist, the gusts of wind whipping the river into whitecaps, the rain drenching the forests, the lightning slashing the sky and the thunder rolling like artillery shots between the mountain peaks — it was a scientific fact that the great, gentle Hudson could quickly become violent and dangerous. Roger Brett, an experienced sailor, knew the danger. But he never let it deter him from his journeys on the river.

A year after Rivery was born aboard the sloop, the Bretts made another eventful voyage to New York in 1713. This time, the trip brought not the beginning of a life, but the end of an era. The Bretts sailed down stream to sever forever their property ties to the city.

They still owned Catharyna's father's house and land on the west side of Broadway between Trinity Church and Fort Anne. The property had been under mortgage to James Emott since June 8, 1708, for the amount of £240. Payment had been due May

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28, 1710, but it was not made.

In the meantime, the Bretts held the title to the property, and their friend, George Clarke, was living in the house with his wife, the former Anne Hyde, a cousin of the Queen, their children, and his wife's mother.

Catharyna and Roger made up their minds to part with the property once and for all, to rid themselves of their obligations in the city and to obtain more cash for their undertakings in Dutchess County.

Leaving the city must have been a wrench for both of them. New York was the place where they had met and married, and where their first two sons were born. And the community was maturing from a raw frontier town to an attractive city.

By the census taken the previous year, on June 5, 1712, New York City had a population of 4,848 whites and 970 blacks. Boston and Philadelphia were bigger, but New York was growing.

Queen Anne, in whose reign Roger had come to America, was still the ruler, with one more year to live. General Robert Hunter was the governor, a Scottish soldier, Latin and French scholar and minor literary figure. He had a wife, two sons and three daughters, and entertained frequently. Colonel Caleb Heathcote was the mayor, a wealthy young Englishman who came to America to forget a disappointment in love, his fiancée having married his older brother. He married the daughter of William (Tangier) Smith, a former governor of the North African city, and had two sons and four daughters.

New York was undergoing constant improvement. Broadway, until then a rough dirt track, had just been graded from Maiden Lane to the Commons, including the part going past the Rombout-Brett house. Shade trees had been planted along both sides of the street.

The social life was brilliant, courtly at home and lively out of doors. There were elaborate dinners, musicales, balls in the houses, carousing in the taverns and quarreling in the streets. In 1713, Dr. John Livingston was killed in a duel with Thomas Dongan, a nephew of the former governor. In the same year, ferry service was established between Manhattan and Staten Island.

On May 1 and 2, 1713, Catharyna and Roger Brett "released" the mortgage on their Broadway place to Thomas George. The amount involved was not recorded, but the Bretts were no longer encumbered by the New York City property, and they were now in possession of ample cash. Less than a month earlier, on April 7, 1713, for £700, they had given George Clarke a mortgage on the "southernmost part" of their land in Dutchess County, excluding their house and mills and five lots then occupied by others under lease.

Clarke moved out of the Broadway house. In the ten years since his arrival as secretary of the colony, he had become a wealthy man. He bought 100 acres of land from Walter Dongan at Hempstead, Long Island, and went there to live with his family.

The Bretts sailed out of New York, back to Fishkill Landing, ready financially to face their future in Dutchess County.

For five more years, Roger Brett lived and worked on his land. During this period, the Brett's oldest son, Thomas, died in 1714 at the age of nine. The youngest boy, Rivery, lived only to be seventeen. But the other brothers, Francis and Robert, flourished in the country life.

During this period, the Bretts hired Robert Dengee, carpenter, of Hempstead, L. I., in 1715 to perform one year's work in exchange for 100 acres of land. When the year

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ended June 30, 1716, the Bretts were so satisfied with Dengee's work that they gave him 110 acres – a ten-acre bonus – along the river just above Peter Du Bois.

The Bretts were beginning to appreciate the advantages of sale of land to a freeholder over lease of land to a tenant. On May 25, 1718, they sold another 500 acres along the river to Richard Townsend of Hempstead. The price was registered with the Dutchess County Clerk only as "a sum of money." The deed specified that the purchaser should pay "quit-rent" of "three couple of good fowels, yearly." But that was a formality. The land was sold.

At this time, when Roger sailed the Hudson, it was to bring produce down to New York City for sale and to bring supplies back to Fishkill. Catharyna, busy at home, did not accompany him so often. His constant companion was the manservant, Samuel.

As they sailed, the two men came into close communion with the elements. The water slipped by swiftly on both sides of the sloop, almost up to the deck and almost within reach from the center of the vessel. The single mast stretched up almost to the sky. The boom, weighing as much as two tons, snapped back and forth across the deck like a twig in a high wind.

The deck was cluttered with cargo, ropes, pulleys, barrels of produce and supplies, and wrapped sails. A low rail, barely two feet high, offered scant protection around the rim of the deck.

The sailing was particularly dangerous when the wind was from the stern. Then, gusts would fill the sail in an instant and fling the boom across the deck, shoulder high. The sailor, standing at the long arm of the wooden rudder, on the slippery high deck in the stern, could easily be hit.

If knocked into the water, the sailor was at the mercy of swirling cross-currents, as strong as five knots off Fishkill, currents that would seem on the surface to be running toward the shore, but with an undertow that would take a man out into the depths of the river.

On a June day in 1718, Roger Brett was sailing his sloop into Fishkill Landing when all the evil spirits and supernatural creatures and frolicsome goblins and mischievous imps of the river's mythology seemed to conspire to conjure up the worst spring storm imaginable. The sky blackened, the wind screamed, the rain pelted, the river swelled, the lightning slashed and the thunder crashed. Roger's sail billowed and the boom snapped across the deck, striking him on the head and sweeping him overboard.

Samuel dived into the river and recovered the body, but it was too late. Roger was drowned. Samuel brought the body, dripping wet up the hill to the Brett homestead.

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CHAPTER TEN

On May 25, 1718, the clerk of Dutchess County recorded this deed:

Grantors: Roger Brett, gentleman, of Dutchess County, and Catharyna, his wife.
Grantee: Richard Townsend of Hempstead, Queens County.
Consider'n: A sum of money.
Quit-rent: Three couple of good fowels, yearly.
Land: Parcel of 500 acres on the East side of Hudson's River, northward of Ye Highlands, within the bounds of land now in the possession of Grantors.
Witnesses: John Beatty, Robert Dengee.

On July 9, 1718, the county clerk recorded this deed:

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, Widow, of the Fishkill, of the first part, George Clarke, Esq., secretary of the province of New York, of the second part.
Grantee: Dirck Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Flushing, Queens County.
Consider'n: five shillings, under Act for Transferring Uses into Possession.
Quit-rent: one peppercorn yearly, if demanded.
Land: A lease for one year of two parcels in Dutchess County; and of 400 acres near the Fishkill, near Casper's Runn and Townsend's Line; one of 1,600 acres near the Fishkill, and adjoining land of Johannes ter Boss.
Witnesses: S. Clowes and Gerhard Clowes.

Suddenly, within a period of six weeks, the status of Catharyna Rombout Brett changed in the official records from wife to widow, and her partner became, not Roger Brett, gentleman, but George Clarke, secretary of the province. Catharyna would have much time to remember her husband and grieve for him. For many years to come, she would still be signing herself "relique of Roger Brett of Rombout Precinct." But there was no time now to be lost in mourning.

Roger Brett was buried simply by his widow and three sons in the cemetery which the family had begun, four years earlier, with the body of the oldest son, Thomas. Then, Catharyna set to work immediately on her own property in Rombout Precinct.

It happened so quickly that she apparently gave no thought to any alternative. There were no longer any ties of family, friendship or finance strong enough to draw her back to New York City. Although her half-brothers and half-sisters still lived there, and she had many friends among the 6,000 residents of the city, she preferred to stay in Dutchess County with only five or six families for neighbors.

There was an unwritten law of Colonial life that no one lived alone. The communities were small. The people were close to one another. In primitive conditions, prey to the assaults of Nature and unprotected by modern medicine, a mate was often lost. But another was soon found. Catharyna's own father and mother, subject to this rule, each married three times. Any exception to the rule, like Ye Frenchman, the first white settler of Rombout Precinct, was considered an eccentric and a curiosity, worthy of a special mark on a map of the region.

Catharyna never accepted another suitor. She was not alone. She had her sons, her servants, her customers, her neighbors and friends. She did not need the helping hand,

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which was often the main motive for remarriage. George Clarke, a happily married man, ten years older than Catharyna, provided her with assistance. She moved gradually into the work of developing and disposing of her land with a pleasure that gave fullness, meaning, and satisfaction to her life and lot as a widow.

She was fortunate to have George Clarke for a friend. Despite the many claims to his attention as secretary of the entire province, member of the Governor's Council in New York City, head of a family on Long Island with his own business interests in Dutchess County as one of the Little Nine Partners, he found time to help Catharyna in two of the most important land sales she ever made -- to the Brinckerhoff and the Van Wyck families.

The first deed that he and Catharyna Brett recorded, granting 2,000 acres of some of the richest land in Dutchess County to Dirck Brinckerhoff on July 9, 1718, was a formality, for the nominal sum of five shillings, converting Brinckerhoff's title to the land from a lease to ownership. A day later, another deed was recorded, on July 10, 1718, concluding the sale for the sum of £800. It read:

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, of the first part, George Clarke, Esq., secretary of the province of New York, of the second part.
Grantee: Dirck Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Flushing, Queens County. Consider'n: £800.
Land: As per Liber 1, page 181, with provision for future adjustment of the acreage.
Reservations: All rivers, creeks and runs of water; the grantee to build no dams nor mills thereon.
Witnesses: S. Clowes, Gerhard Clowes.

Dirck Brinckerhoff, a prosperous farmer, never moved up to Dutchess County from Long Island, where he lived from 1667 to 1748. He bought the land on the north bank of Fishkill Creek, from Fishkill village to Sprout Creek, as an investment for his four sons, Abraham, John, Isaac and Jacob. The Brinckerhoffs, with the Bretts, the Van Wycks, and other predominantly Dutch families, became prodigious pioneers who intermarried and multiplied, gaining property and respect and influence in the new community that was to become America.

The oldest Brinckerhoff son, Abraham, born in 1700, moved to Dutchess County as a young man and built the first family house about 1718, a two-room stone building with a chimney between the rooms. He died there at the age of forty-three, leaving a widow, Femmetje, and seven children. Abraham's oldest son, Derick, born about 1720, inherited his father's house and land, operated a general store and became a power in the county, colonel of a regiment of militia and chairman of the Fishkill vigilance committee during the Revolution and a representative in the General Assembly of the State of New York after the Revolutionary War.

Derick began the enlargement of the house with a wooden frame addition to the original two rooms. More than two centuries later, the house was still standing at the same location, now the corner of Routes 52 and 82, surrounded by housing developments. The house is still owned and occupied by Brinckerhoffs. It grew to a great, sprawling, three-story frame structure with a mansard roof, dormer windows, and a wide porch. It is steeped in history as the place where George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Baron von Steuben reviewed American and German soldiers marching

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through Dutchess County in 1778, and where the Marquis de Lafayette recovered from illness in an upstairs bedroom.

After the Brinckerhoff sale, Catharyna did not plunge headlong into the real estate business. At this point, she had made only three sales, all with the aid of a partner. With her husband, she had consigned the 110 acres to the carpenter, Robert Dengee, and 500 acres to Richard Townsend. With George Clarke, she had sold the 2,000 acres to Dirck Brinckerhoff. Now she had some cash on hand, and she had many other things to do.

Her house was a busy place, with three growing boys, a swarm of servants and slaves, and a steady stream of visitors, Dutch and Indian. Catharyna had to provide food, clothing and shelter as well as an education for her boys, there being no school. She managed her grist mill at the mouth of Fishkill Creek, and to it she added a saw mill. The mill became the hub of a network of trails, bringing farmers with their bags of grain to be ground, and Indians with their fur skins to be exchanged for meal. Ulster County men from the other side of the Hudson came across the river by canoe with their grain. Catharyna crossed the river to their side to worship, the Lutheran church at Newburgh being the only church in the region, although itinerant ministers of the Dutch Reformed faith sometimes held services in the homes of Dutchess County. Almost two years passed before Catharyna Brett made another land sale.

As her need for cash again became pressing, she began to make sales alone, in her own name. She had acquired confidence in herself now.

Her first sale on her own went on May 23, 1720 to James Hussey, who bought 100 acres that he farmed under lease on the north side of Fishkill Creek on the road from Fishkill Landing to the village of Fishkill. He paid £75, and Catharyna reserved all rights to the creek and to "trees suitable for the saw mill of the grantor."

On March 11, 1726, she sold to George Cooper, already living in Dutchess County, 100 acres "near a place called by the Indians *pacghquaick*," later to be known a Poughquag, a pleasant farm site a few miles in from the Hudson River. The price was again £75. Cooper, described as a "laborer," could not pay the full amount in cash, so an additional deed was registered on the same date providing that Cooper would return the land to Catharyna Brett unless he paid her £38.1.0 on or before May 17, 1730.

On September 25, 1727, Daniel Ter Boss purchased from Catharyna the farm that he already occupied. The price was £100. The acreage was not specified in the deed.

Still plagued by her ever-present need for money, Catharyna entered into another complicated financial transaction on December 18, 1729, involving the property at the mouth of Fishkill Creek where she and her husband had first settled. She gave a mortgage for £643.13.3 to Isaac de Peyster, a wealthy New York City merchant, on her mill, her original house, and 300 acres on the north side of Fishkill Creek at Fishkill Landing. This was the same property that Catharyna and her husband had mortgaged to William Peartree in 1709 for £200, and to Thomas George in 1711 for £250, and which the Bretts had reacquired after the deaths of these gentlemen.

It was during the year 1729 that Catharyna suffered still another painful loss in her immediate family. Her youngest son, Rivery, died at the age of seventeen. She was left with Francis, twenty-two, and Robert, twenty. They were old enough to be of help to her, but they were getting ready to start their own homes and families, and Catharyna continued to manage her own business.

For fifteen years, after the big Brinckerhoff sale in 1718, George Clarke continued to hold his mortgage on the southern part of Catharyna Brett's land. They made another important joint sale in 1733 -- to Cornelius Van Wyck -- and Clarke began to liquidate

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his interest in Dutchess County. The Van Wyck transaction, like the one with Brinckerhoff, was accomplished by two deeds on consecutive days, converting title to the land from a lease to ownership for a nominal sum, and then registering the actual sale.

In a collection of the Dutchess County Historical Society, called "Eighteenth century records of the portion of Dutchess County, New York, that was included in Rombout precinct and the original town of Fishkill," the deeds are summarized thus:

April 9, 1733

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, daughter and sole heir of Francis Rombout, of the first part; George Clarke, Esq., secretary of the province of New York, of second part.
Grantee: Cornelius Van Wyck, yeoman, of Hempstead, Queens County.
Consider'n: 5 shillings, under Act for Transferring Uses into possession.
Quit-rent: One peppercorn, yearly, if demanded.
Land: Near a certain river called the Fishkill, part of Francis Rombout's share of a large tract, adjoining lands of Henry Terboss and Henry Rossekrance. Parcel of 959 acres, one rood.
Witnesses: Cornelius Wiltsie, William Burch

April 10, 1733

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, of the first part, George Clarke, Esq., secretary of the province of New York, of the second part.
Grantee: Cornelius Van Wyck of Hempstead, Queens County.
Consider'n: 704.18.0
Quit-rent: Such an equal share and proportion of yearly quit-rent as is due and payable to the King's Majesty, his successors, for ye quantity of 959 acres, one rood.
Land: as per Liber 1, page 167.
Exceptions: One-half part of all mines and minerals and any right to build a grist mill.
Witnesses: Cornelius Wiltsie, William Burch.

The land which Cornelius Van Wyck purchased was a flat expanse on the south bank of Fishkill Creek along the King's Highway, then a dirt track between New York and Albany. In 1735, two years after acquiring the nearly 1,000 acres, Van Wyck moved up to Dutchess County from Long Island, when he was thirty-eight years old. He began clearing the land, and built a house with one large room and a smaller room, with a chimney and fireplace between them. Like the other settlers, he expanded the house as his family grew.

The Van Wycks became closely intertwined with the Bretts and the Brinckerhoffs. Cornelius' daughter Margaret married Madam Brett's son Francis. Cornelius' grandson, Isaac, married Betsy Van Wyck, daughter of Dr. Theodorus Van Wyck. Betsy died in 1800. Isaac's second wife was Sarah Brett Brinckerhoff, daughter of Robert Brett and widow of Abraham Brinckerhoff.

During the Revolutionary War, the Cornelius Van Wyck house was used as headquarters by officers of the Quartermaster Department of the Continental Army, who maintained a supply depot at Fishkill on the main route between New England and the South. Soldiers of the Continental Army camped on the Van Wyck farm.

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More than two centuries later, the house is still standing, facing Route 9, formerly the King's Highway and the Albany Post Road. It is adjacent to a vast cloverleaf connecting Route 9 with the east-west Interstate Highway 84. In 1970, the house was acquired and lovingly preserved by the Fishkill Historical Society.



Van Wyck Homestead, Route 9, Fishkill. In 1732 Cornelius Van Wyck purchased 959 acres from Madam Brett and built the wing on the right. The main section of the house was constructed about 1750. The Van Wyck and Brett families were connected by the marriage of Cornelius' daughter Margaret to Madam Brett's son Francis. (Photo courtesy of the Fishkill Historical Society)

So successful was Cornelius Van Wyck's settlement that, one year after he moved to Dutchess County, his brother, Theodorus, also bought land from Catharyna Brett. Theodorus' deed, recorded May 15, 1736, gave him a "parcel of 900 acres, on the east side of Hudson's river, at the north side of the Highlands, on the south side of the Fishkill." The price was £830. Catharyna Brett reserved "one equal half-part of all mines or minerals found," and prohibited "the right to build a mill."

Theodorus' property lay east of Cornelius Van Wyck's, on a plain called Fishkill Hook, from the Dutch Vis Kil Hoeck (Fish Creek Corner), so named because of the corner formed by the creek and the Fishkill mountains.

Theodorus built his house in the 1740s, a one and one-half story frame structure with a single-slanted roof, a center hall and two chimneys. He married and had twelve children, seven of whom lived to maturity and raised their own children. Theodorus died September 15, 1776, at the age of seventy-nine.

During the Revolutionary War, his widow and heirs rented their house to John Jay, then a delegate to the New York Provincial Congress, meeting in Fishkill. Jay, who went on to become first Chief Justice of the United State, found shelter for his family in the Theodorus Van Wyck house from 1776 to 1781.

Two centuries later, the house was still standing, cramped between auto Route 52 and 84, but still privately owned and comfortably occupied.¹⁴ The fertile land, once

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farmed by Theodorus Van Wyck, was occupied by John Jay High School and the East Fishkill facility of the System Products Division of IBM.

Before Theodorus came to Dutchess County, the sale to his brother, Cornelius Van Wyck, was George Clarke's last joint venture with Catharyna Brett. One year after that sale, Clarke canceled by a deed recorded with the Secretary of State in Albany on November 14, 1734, the mortgage for £700 that he had held on the "southernmost part" of the Brett lands since April 7, 1713. For twenty-one years he had been a partner of Catharyna's, presumably collecting interest on his investment. The amount that Catharyna received from Cornelius Van Wyck, £704.18.0, was almost exactly the amount of Clarke's mortgage. The proceeds from that sale could have been used to pay off the mortgage.

From then on, Clarke had little time for Dutchess County. Two years after liquidating his partnership with Catharyna, he assumed the highest office of the province. He became lieutenant governor and acting governor in 1736 under difficult and dangerous circumstances.

New York province then had a population of about 50,000—43,000 whites and 7,000 blacks, most of them slaves. New York City was a small town of 7,000 whites and 1,500 blacks. Dutchess County was still a comparative wilderness with 1,600 whites and 100 blacks.

The city was divided politically between parties known as the Popular, a strong majority, and the Court, a minority, but holding positions of power. The parties later became Patriots and Loyalists, Whigs and Tories, and eventually Americans and British. The division culminated forty years later in the Revolutionary War. In 1736, it almost precipitated a small civil war.

Clarke, a functionary of the British government and a member of the Governor's Council, was a leader of the Court party. A tall, erect man, military in bearing but kind in manner, he had many friends, but as an agent of the royal court, he was not popular among the people.

The Popular party leader was Rip Van Dam, a prosperous and ambitious Dutch merchant, president of the Governor's Council, who had served as acting governor of the province until he was relieved by the Governor, Colonel William Cosby, who came to New York after similar service on the Mediterranean island of Minorca.

When Cosby assumed office in August, 1732, he demanded from Van Dam one-half of the year's salary that Van Dam had collected as acting governor. The Dutchman, no man to be trifled with, particularly in financial affairs, refused flatly. Cosby brought suit in the Court of the Exchequer, but the judges never ruled in the case. Van Dam kept the money. Cosby harbored hatred.

In 1736, Cosby contracted tuberculosis. Feeling his life slipping away and fearing that Van Dam would assume power again, the dying Cosby called a meeting of the Governor's Council in his bedchamber and ordered Van Dam's name stricken from its membership. The council obediently elected Clarke to succeed Van Dam as president.

Cosby died on March 7, 1736, and Clarke automatically took his place, pending the arrival of new instructions from London. But Van Dam, protesting that Cosby's deathbed action was illegal, refused to recognize Clarke as acting governor. Backed by a majority of the people, Van Dam demanded the seal of the province from Mrs. Cosby, and proceeded to appoint his own city administration.

Clarke had the army on his side, and his supporters held the governor's office and the fort. The two parties were on the brink of civil war when a ship arrived from

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London in October, 1736, bringing the royal appointment of Clarke as lieutenant governor. Van Dam and the Popular party, while ready to fight their opponents in the colony, were not prepared to challenge the British crown. Clarke proceeded to govern the province, unchallenged.

While working in the fort at the foot of Manhattan, Clarke continued to live at Hempstead on Long Island until 1738, when he moved his family back to the city. His wife's mother died during that year. Two years later, his wife, Anne Hyde Clarke, died in May 1740. She was buried in a vault of Trinity Church beside her mother and Lady Cornbury, wife of the previous governor.

During this period, Clarke was having the same money problems that every governor had experienced with the Assembly. By then the elected representatives of the people had established firmly the principle that they would appropriate funds for the governor's salary only one year at a time, not for several years, as had been the practice in the past. In March, 1739, the Assembly added insult to injury by cutting the governor's salary from £1,500 to £1,300 a year.

Already saddened by the loss of his wife and distressed by the reduction in his income, Clarke went through the most serious crisis of his seven-year governorship in the winter of 1740-41. It was a hard winter, so cold that the Hudson River froze solid from shore to shore, despite its moving tides and its mixture of salt and fresh water. The cold lasted from November until April, and there was six feet of snow in the city streets. It was a winter that conjured up phantoms and fears in the minds of New Yorkers.

During that winter, a rash of fires broke out all over the city – even inside the fort – giving rise to suspicions of arson and causing the episode known in Colonial history as the Negro Plot of 1741.

Blacks constituted an often sullen minority of about one-fifth of the population. Most of them were slaves, and all of them were segregated from whites, except the families they served. They were bought and sold like animals, treated abominably, tied to the whipping post for trivial offenses, and tortured for major crimes. It was no wonder that they resented their treatment, and that they were suspected of starting the fires.

While the source of the fires was still being investigated, an important robbery was committed on February 28, 1741. The loot was traced to the tavern of John Hughson, a white proprietor, who was highly suspect because he admitted blacks to his combination bar and brothel, and they used the place to meet, drink and gamble.

Hughson, his wife, and a barmaid, Mary Burton, were arrested. Under questioning, Mary told a wild story of a Negro plot to burn down the city, kill most of the whites, and establish a black kingdom with Hughson as the ruler and a slave named Caesar as the governor.

Mary's story was "corroborated" by other servants and by prostitutes who frequented Hughson's place. As news of the "plot" spread, the worst fire of the winter broke out March 18, 1741, inside the walls of the fort, destroying the governor's house, the chapel and other buildings. Panic gripped the city.

Under Clarke's orders, New York then wrote the darkest page of its Colonial history. In a savage campaign of repression, authorities arrested 154 blacks, of whom eighteen were hanged, thirteen were burned at the stake and seventy-one were transported out of the colony. The others, after questioning, were released. Twenty-one whites also were arrested, and three were hanged, including Hughson and his

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wife.

When the campaign was over, Clarke led the community in a service of thanksgiving. Mary Burton received a 100-pound reward for her "information." The "plot" was never proved.

After that experience, the pleasures of life in the colony, even that of enjoying the supreme power of governor of the province, began to pale for Clarke. He raised no objection to being replaced. A new governor, George Clinton, arrived in New York on September 22, 1743, and soon afterward, Clarke returned to England.

He had been in the colony for forty years. Now, at the age of sixty-eight, he was wealthy, weary and wifeless. With the fortune he had acquired in New York, estimated at £100,000, he purchased a fine estate in Chester -- a Roman-walled city and county seat of Cheshire in Northwest England. He died there, and was buried in the Chester Cathedral, where a tablet was placed, inscribed:

"To the memory of George Clark of Hyde, Esquire, who was formerly Lieutenant Governor of New York and afterwards became resident in this city. He died Jan. 12, 1760, aged 84 years, and was interred in this chapel."

New Yorkers judged their governors often by the amount of money the man took out of the colony. The governor who took the least was the best. The governor who took the most was the worst. By that standard, Clarke, with a supposed saving of £100,000 on a peak salary of £1,580 a year, was highly suspect.

The late Henry Noble MacCracken, president of Vassar College and distinguished historian of Dutchess County, in his book, *Old Dutchess Forever*, dismissed Clarke with these words: "Clarke, though friendly, is not to be trusted." But MacCracken conceded that Clarke and his companions in the "Little Nine Partners" land patent -- Rip Van Dam, Roger Mompesson, Sampson Broughton, James Graham, Peter Fauconnier, Richard Sackett, Thomas Wenham and Robert Lurting -- were "far more distinguished" than the holders of the "Great Nine Partners" patent, even though these were some of the most prominent men of the province -- Colonel Caleb Heathcote, Major Augustin Graham, James Emott, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Filkin, David Jamison, Hendryck ten Eyck, John Aertson, William Creed and H. Jarvis Marshall.

Clarke had several legitimate sources of income. In addition to his salary, he received a commission from London for tax collections, and he had other interests -- land investments, liquor sales, and money-lending -- all legal, if not very noble. He held the mortgage on Catharyna Brett's land for twenty-one years, presumably collecting the interest on £700 all that time.

Later generations in Dutchess County came to the conclusion that Clarke was a scoundrel who cheated Catharyna Brett. Under this theory, it was held that Clarke, being related to royalty, had somehow obtained his claim to the Brett land by trickery connected with the royal patent granted to Francis Rombout, Catharyna's father, and that Clarke milked her of her money before canceling the mortgage.

The theory was based on the fact that Clarke obviously made a lot of money in the colony. But all other evidence indicated that he was, in fact, a good friend of Catharyna Brett and of great assistance to her, advancing cash to her and her husband when they needed it, helping her pay off the mortgage, and leaving her in comfortable circumstances.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Madam Brett's Indian neighbors, the Wappingers, kept their council fire at Wiccopee, about ten miles up Fishkill Creek from her homestead. It was a place of fertile clearings, lush foliage and rare fragrances, sheltered in what the Dutch called "The Hook," the corner formed by the creek and the Highlands. In the Algonquin language, Wiccopee meant "nut trees." The nuts grew on hickory trees and black walnuts. They also had planted apple orchards and pear trees. All the other food they needed came from the forest and the fields and the creek. The Wappingers were a happy, loving people, and that was their undoing.

There had never been war between them and their Algonquin brothers, the Manhattans to the south and the Mohicans to the north. They were at peace with their new friends, the white people, and particularly with Mistress Brett, who permitted them to live untroubled, as they always had, on the land that her father had bought from their ancestors.

They lived in wigwams, made of bent poles and bark walls, with a hole in the roof to permit the smoke from the fire to escape. Among the wigwams stood the "Fort," a square plot of land on a rise, surrounded by wooden palisades, where the women, children, and aged took shelter when the men went away to hunt or fish. These men never fought. They were too peaceable to hate.

Theirs was a good life. They painted their faces and bodies with dyes made from clay or berries. They adorned themselves with necklaces of shells and pendants of colored stones. They did ceremonial dances around the council fire. They wore no war bonnets, only a single large eagle feather in the scalp locks of the men. Their food was there for the taking -- game, birds, fish -- and they planted corn, beans, pumpkins. The men were big and handsome, the women comely, the children obedient. The women did the work. Often, the men dozed, outdoors in the summer, indoors in the winter on the benches that were also beds around the walls of the wigwams. The men were content to hunt and fish, to paddle and swim, and to lead their placid village lives.

Their sachem, in accordance with tribal lore, had for his sole mission in life to "promote their peace and happiness." It was their code that "whatever he does for his nation must be done out of friendship and good will." The sachem, when the Bretts came, was the man whom Catharyna called "Old Nimham." He and his people soon learned that too much peace and happiness can be deceptive and debilitating, and too much friendship and good will can lead to betrayal and destruction.

The Wappingers recognized the existence of enemies. Such were the wild beasts of the forest, when aroused, but they killed the beasts only for food or in self-defense. Among their fellow men, they knew foes, the fierce Mohawks from the Iroquois nation to the north. When the Mohawks came down on their plundering raids, the Wappingers submitted to them. The Wappingers were as strong and as straight as the Mohawks, but they had been here longer. They had lost the ways of the warpath and they had developed the pleasant, but often expensive trait of gentleness.

Sometimes, the Mohicans, closer to the territory of the Mohawks, fought their northern neighbors, but never the Wappingers. It was easier for the Wappingers to yield than to fight.

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The Manito, or God, of the Wappingers made the wide land and sky, the sun, the moon, the stars; and to them, all beings were friendly.

The Walum Olum, or Bible, of the Algonquins, preserved in "Red Marks" on stones, told them that, under their Manito, "all had cheerful knowledge, all had leisure, all thought in gladness." There was an evil being, "a mighty magician," who came to earth, "and with him brought badness, quarreling, unhappiness; brought bad weather, brought sickness, brought death." But, "All this took place of old on the earth, beyond the great tidewater, at the first."

The Walum Olum, chanted once a year to a meeting of the tribe, had for its conclusion: "Watcher was chief; he looked toward the sea. At this time, from north and south, the Whites came. They are peaceful; they have great things; who are they?"

So when more white men came, the Wappingers met them with hospitality and affection and admiration, almost to the point of worship.

The first to come had been Henry Hudson and the crew of the *Half Moon*, in 1609. The English navigator, exploring for the Dutch, was looking for a northwest passage to China. He found the land-locked river that was to be named for him, and America.

Hudson's second mate, Robert Juet, kept a diary that bore testimony, among other wonders of the New World, to the sweetness of the Wappinger tribes. Downstream, the white men were attacked several times by boatloads of suspicious or predatory Indians, and the *Half Moon* sailed on with arrows sticking out of her stern. But upstream, the second mate noted, "We found very loving people and very old men, where we were well used."

These were the Wappingers. "The people came aboard and brought us ears of Indian corn and pumpkins and tobacco, which we bought for trifles," Juet noted. "In the afternoon, our master's mate went on land with an old savage, a governor of the country, who carried him to his house and made him good cheer."

Going back down the river, the *Half Moon* stopped here again, and "the old man came aboard and would have us anchor and go on land to eat with him; but the wind being fair, we would not yield to his request. So he left us, being very sorrowful for our departure."

The simple "old savage" would have been more sorrowful, could he have foreseen that the white men he welcomed would return and drive his people out of their ancestral lands to their extermination.

It would have been inconceivable to the "old savage" that there could be enmity between peoples because the colors of their skins differed, or, more significantly, because one coveted the other's lands. That would have been too savage for the mind of a friendly old Wappinger to comprehend. That would have to await the advent of civilization.

Only once, during the Dutch rule, was there a report of trouble with the Wappingers. That was in 1644, twenty years before the coming of the English, when a barge, going down the Hudson from Fort Orange to Nieuw Amsterdam, was ambushed by the Wappingers, and hundreds of beaver skins were stolen.

The incident was recorded by the Dutch with some astonishment as the act of "a nation with whom we had never had the least trouble before." Perhaps the Indians were feeling the effects of the alcohol they were just beginning to absorb, that so inflamed their intolerant systems that it literally rendered them incompetent; or, perhaps, they were experimenting with the cupidity they were just learning, the greed for the white man's things that they could not make themselves. After that, the Dutch

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never had any trouble with the Wappingers again.

When the English came, the Wappingers permitted their boats to pass freely and entered trade with them eagerly. When Catharyna's father, and his partner, Gulian Verplanck, offered to buy the lands of the Wappingers, the Indians negotiated the sale willingly. In the deed, they declared themselves "fully payed, Contented and Satisfied."

It was no surprise to the Bretts, when their home was built and their mill working, that the Wappingers should become their friends. There were only about 1,000 in the tribe, about 200 of whom would be described in other nations as fighting men. They came down to the mill on foot, along the trail beside Fishkill Creek, or by canoe. They brought their corn and beans and furs, and they received meal in exchange. They mingled freely with the Bretts, and with the other white settlers, gathered for their grists.

Roger Brett must have found the Indians somewhat malodorous to the sensitive nostrils of an English gentleman, for they rubbed their bodies with the grease of wild animals. In the summer, they wore no clothing above the waist, and in the winter they wrapped themselves in soggy fur robes, or mantles of feathers.

Roger could not talk to them, except in sign language. The Indians never hesitated, in fact they hastened to adopt the white man's things -- the alcohol that poisoned them, the guns that killed so much better than their bows and arrows and tomahawks, the clothes that made them forsake their own handicrafts -- but at first, they did not bother with his language. Even though their own language was not written, they considered it more beautiful -- as, indeed, it was to many ears -- than English or Dutch or German. Even those Indians who happened to learn a little English, to help in trading, were not likely to admit it, as a point of pride. If the white man wanted to speak to them, he had to learn their language. And a surprising number did, but Roger did not have time for that.

Moreover, he had little to talk to them about, except business. They would have been puzzled by his anecdotes about life at the court of Lord Cornbury. He would have been bored by their talks of a long hunt in the forest. Business, they did have in common, and for that, Roger was quite prepared and pleased to receive them.

To the Brett children -- Thomas, Francis, Robert and Rivery -- the Wappingers were pals and playmates. The young Indians came to the mill with their bows and arrows. And while the men conducted their tedious business, the boys played.

Bows and arrows were no longer weapons for the men, who now had guns and knives. More than twenty-five years before, when the Wappingers sold this land to Francis Rombout, they received among the articles of payment, 100 pounds of powder, 100 bars of lead, 30 guns and 40 knives. These were the men's weapons now, and the bows and arrows were playthings for the youngsters.

In the clearing beside the mill, they would thrust a split stick into the ground, place a penny in the notch and shoot at it from a distance of forty to fifty feet. It was an inept young Indian who could not knock the penny out of the stick nineteen times out of twenty. The men, waiting for their grists, watched the boys and applauded and tossed them more pennies.

One of the young Indians differed from the others. He did not show off like the others, but stood somewhat aside, aloof and more dignified. He was only about ten years old when the mill was started, but already he had a regal bearing. Still, like the other boys, he wanted to know the whites, and they soon found that he could -- and

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was willing to -- speak some English. He was Daniel Nimham, son of the sachem.

Roger and Catharyna Brett received him courteously, and soon he became the companion and guide of their sons.

Daniel had many friends. There was his brother, Sake. There was Stephen Kounham, who was particularly unafraid with the white people, because he was part Dutch. Nearly fifty years before, Lieutenant Wolfertse Van Couwenhoven had wintered with a yacht of the West India Company at Fishkill, and the Indian lad was his descendant. There was One-Pound Poktone, whose family somehow had been in contact with the English. There were Pechewyn and Taquehamas, who grew up with Daniel, and later went hunting with him, winning bounty from the English for wolf heads.

But now, they practiced with their bows and arrows, learning to shoot a bird on the wing, a squirrel in a tree. In the winter, they threw chunks of ice across the frozen river and shot at them. There was other lore to learn -- how to track game and set traps, and catch fish and paddle a canoe. They learned how to use fire to cook, to make smoke signals, to burn the hull of a boat out of a big log. Secretly, they practiced heating stones that they would later use to burn the hair off the sides of their heads, leaving only the long scalp lock. But they were too young for that now.

The men were kind and patient with them, encouraging the boys with gifts of arrow heads and feathers, and as they grew older, letting them come on short hunting and fishing trips.

Roger and Catharyna Brett were invited to the village to see the wigwams, and sit by the fire, to share the Indians' stew and corn cakes and to admire their treasures -- shells and stones, feathers and snake skins, fox tails and porcupine quills, bear claws and deer teeth.

Catharyna became a familiar guest at the village. At first, the young Dutch matron, properly clothed from ankle to chin, may have been surprised to see the Indian women with their firm, full breasts, unselfconsciously exposed. The squaws never came to the mill, and it was only by going to their village that Catharyna could have become accustomed to seeing them with leather aprons, leggings and moccasins as their sold articles of every-day summer apparel.

The young Dutch mother, with her servants and slaves, may also have been surprised to find the Indian women, their babies tied to their backs, doing all the work. They toiled in the fields, planting and picking; they dried the corn, beans and berries; they ground the meal in their mortars and pestles; and they cooked over the open fire in pots that they fashioned from clay, pointed at the bottom to stand between stones over hot coals.

The young Dutch housekeeper, so careful with her family's food, would have been startled, if she looked into a pot, to see pieces of horse and dog meat, still covered with skin and hair, floating in the stew. To the Indians, a fat young dog, freshly killed, was a special delicacy.

Catharyna, who spent much of her time at home on handiwork, found much here to admire -- the grass mats, hanging on the walls to keep out drafts, or scattered on the benches and the ground as rugs; the baskets, swinging from the ceiling as containers for herbs and nuts. She must have been interested in the spinning and weaving, which differed from her own. The Indian women had no wheels, no shuttles, no needles, even no wool, for they had no sheep. By hand, they spun fine thread from the inner bark of trees; they dyed it red, green, blue, purple, black. And they wove mats of exquisite

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design.

Their loom was made of two forked sticks, fixed firmly in the ground, with another stick lying across the forks like a tent pole. The mats hung down from the top pole, and the women worked the fibers in and out with their fingers to form their designs. They also cured skins and furs to make soft garments, and embroidered them with small shells and beads that tinkled as they walked. They also used porcupine quills and dried grass for embroidery, employing a thin, sharp bone from a deer's foot to punch holes in the leather.

Their finery, rather baroque to Catharyna's eighteenth century Dutch taste, was to them commonplace. When the Indian women dressed for a special occasion, they oiled their hair and blackened the rims of their eyes. They donned buckskin skirts, leather jackets and furs. They twined black and white wampum around their heads, necks and waists. And they wore dangling necklaces of long, braided deer hair. Their costumes were copied centuries later, with only slightly less fragrant materials.

More often, for them, the day meant toil with earth and fire and water, with no care for appearances, and when they wore leggings and moccasins, it was for protection against stones and brambles. The boys wore only a breech cloth in the summer, the little children nothing at all. The coats and shawls that the women wore in the winter were only to warm them. And in the evenings, summer or winter, while the men gathered around the fire in the big lodge to hear more of the old men's tales, the women would get together in one of the wigwams to talk -- and to work.

After each visit to the village, Catharyna rode her horse back to her comfortable homestead of stone and shingle, with its wide fireplace, its iron kettles, its wooden looms, its warm linens. But she never spoke scornfully of her experiences among the Indians. To the contrary, she referred to them frequently and firmly as her friends.

There came a time when this friendship was put to the test and was found to be true. The time was 1721, when William Burnet was the royal governor, and Cadwallader Colden, later to become acting governor, was surveyor-general of the province of New York. The test was so important that both of these high dignitaries became personally, deeply involved.

At the time, Roger Brett had been dead for three years, and his widow was busy selling pieces of her property to settlers moving up to Dutchess County from New York City. News of Madam Brett's attractive offerings -- fertile land among friendly people at a fair price -- was spreading widely, by word of mouth, and sales were going well when suddenly she was confronted by a challenge on her own land, not only from Indians, but also from white residents of Poughkeepsie.

The story is largely contained in a letter that Madam Brett wrote many years later -- obviously biased in her favor -- but enough corroborative evidence can be found in other accounts -- including official documents -- to convey a clear picture of the confrontation.

The town of Poughkeepsie had just been designated by the provincial government as the county seat, and it was destined to outstrip Fishkill as the principal community of Dutchess County. The county clerk began keeping records there in 1718, and Poughkeepsie was where the courthouse was established and lawyers hung out their shingles; offices, stores and inns were opened, and business began to grow along the river waterfront and up the high hill along Main Street.

Madam Brett despised some of her Poughkeepsie neighbors. They were not like the Dutch burghers of other parts of Dutchess County. They were English, Scots, or Irish

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businessmen, investors or speculators. Madam Brett referred to them as "Poughkeepsie people," and when she wrote the words, the scorn dripped from her pen. She suspected them of cohabiting with black former slaves, a practice frowned upon by the Dutch, and of plying Indians with drink for nefarious purposes.

Madam Brett accused the "Poughkeepsie people" specifically of encroaching on her land and selling some of it as though it were their own. She named the "ring leader" in this dastardly deed as "one Lewis," a man she hated so much that she could not bear to mention his first name or his titles, and he was the proud possessor of many.

Her despised opponent was none other than Colonel Leonard Lewis, as distinguished a man as could be found in the county. Twenty years older than Madam Brett, Lewis was born in New York City in 1667, son of Thomas Lewis, who came to America from Belfast, Ireland. Lewis married Elizabeth Hardenbergh in New York in 1688, and they moved to Dutchess County in 1710, buying a large part of Poughkeepsie from the original patent-holder, Myndert Harmense Van Dan Bogaerdt.

Lewis became a colonel of the militia, a member of the assembly, treasurer of the county and first judge of the court of common pleas. All his children rose to prominence in Poughkeepsie. He and his wife's brother, Johannes Hardenbergh, were among the holders of the Great Hardenbergh Patent, covering much of the Catskill Mountains on the west bank of the Hudson.

But to Madam Brett, he was "one Lewis," because his land claims conflicted with hers. Soon after he came to Dutchess County in 1710 (only one year after the Bretts moved up the river), Lewis built a mill on the north bank of the Fallkill, a creek running into the Hudson at Poughkeepsie, north of and parallel to Wappingers Creek. Two years later, in partnership with George Clarke, who was then friend and adviser to the Bretts, Lewis obtained an Indian deed of sale for land south of the Fallkill.

Madam Brett claimed that this land was hers.

At a time when boundaries were drawn from rock to tree, and distances were measured by how far a man could walk, it was inevitable that disputes should arise over property lines. Madam Brett's boundary was particularly prone to misinterpretation.

When the Rombout patent was divided among the three partners -- Rombout, Verplanck and Van Cortlandt -- on March 15, 1708, Catharyna Brett, only child of the senior partner, received Lot no. 1, the southernmost share along Fishkill Creek. She was also given an area at the mouth of Wappingers Creek.

Both the 1683 Indian deed of sale and the 1685 royal patent specified that the boundary at this point should extend east from the Hudson, 500 rods, or 8,250 feet north of Wappingers Creek, "however it runs," and the creek runs crookedly. There was no natural border. No line had been surveyed. Madam Brett's claim went less than one-fourth the distance to the Fallkill. The rest of the territory was no-man's-land.

The Indians, with perfectly good intentions, could accept payment for this territory. A man of Lewis' distinction could not normally be accused of acting in bad faith by buying it. But Madam Brett insisted that part of the land he bought overlapped hers, and when Lewis began to dispose of it in the 1720s, she took vigorous action to defend her claim.

First, she attempted, in what she called a "kind manner," to persuade two white strangers living there to leave. When that failed, she went to court, obtained a "writ of possession" of the property in dispute, and ordered the pair to leave. They did not contest the action in court.

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But Lewis and his associates did not abandon their claim. Instead, according to Madam Brett (Lewis' side of the story was not recorded), the "Poughkeepsie people" went among the Indians telling them that Madam Brett had stolen their land and inciting them to violence against her, and the Indians went to her homestead, threatening to kill her.

Somehow, whether by giving Madam Brett warning in time to escape or by persuading the Indians to desist, Nimham came to his friend's rescue. "The White People Could Not corrupt him," she wrote. "He was an Honest Morral Creature as ever I knew for he was an Instrument to protect me for I was in Danger of my Life."

Madam Brett sent a message down the Hudson to Governor Burnet, complaining about the attack, and the governor promptly called a meeting of all concerned. Nimham brought his tribesmen to the powwow. Such sessions were not uncommon. Sir William Johnson, superintendent of Indian affairs, often summoned the Indians to his upstate estate at Spring Hill to discuss problems. They would camp on the lawn, eat, drink, smoke, and talk until the problem was settled.

Burnet's meeting was held on neutral ground, at the Haskol family farm, directly across the river from Fishkill Landing and just south of the town of Newburgh. It must have been a strange assemblage – the governor and his English entourage, Madam Brett and her Dutch family and friends, Lewis with His Irish and Scottish associates, the sachem and his Indian tribe, men and boys.

According to the account that Madam Brett wrote later, and official documents, the governor agreed with her charge that the Indians sold some of her land illegally and that the Poughkeepsie people had occupied it wrongly. The governor listened patiently as some Indians protested – through an interpreter – that Madam Brett had stolen their land. Then, the governor had the interpreter read to the Indians, in their own language, the deed of sale of the land to Madam Brett's father, signed with the marks and names of their ancestors.

According to Madam Brett, the Indians acknowledged the authenticity of the names on the deed; the governor scolded them gently and ordered them to stop making false claims.

The governor, however, realized that the problem of the unmarked boundary had not been solved, and he had a premonition that this peace was not permanent. He suggested that Madam Brett have a survey made so that the Indians would know precisely the limits of her land and, with her agreement, he issued a warrant for the surveyor-general, Colden, to draw the line personally.

What Madam Brett reported as happening next was not confirmed by any other source. And, with all due respect to the truthfulness and integrity of a decent Colonial dame, it was difficult to believe. Her hatred of the Poughkeepsie people may have been so blinding that she suspected them of atrocities they could not possibly perpetrate. She charged that the Poughkeepsie people, presumably including Lewis, sent a band of drunken Indians to stop the survey. It would hardly be in character for Colonel Lewis to get a group of Indians drunk intentionally, or to set them against a representative of the government, of which he was an official himself.

But the Indians were quite capable of getting themselves drunk, and they might well have resented and resisted the appearance of a government agent, carrying mysterious instruments, on the boundary of land in which they had a legitimate interest. Whatever the instigation, a confrontation took place. Colden, the stiff, tight-lipped Scot, graduate of Glasgow University, physician, philosopher and mathematician, was surrounded

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by a crowd of screaming, staggering Indians, who threatened to smash his instruments and, by implication, some parts of his person, unless he stopped the survey. Colden, reputed to be the most learned man of the colony, was also among the most prudent. He ceased work, and called for Madam Brett to come to the scene.

It was a testimonial to the courage and strength of the little Dutch lady that the surveyor-general would summon her to such an encounter -- and that, without hesitation, she would respond. It apparently never occurred to her to hide in her homestead and leave the conflict to the men. Instead, she rode her horse through the fields to the site of the survey.

When she arrived, old Nimham and his two sons were already there, arguing with Colden. Against a stranger like Colden, the sachem was bound to side with his tribesmen and oppose the survey. But Madam Brett, a friend and neighbor, could convince Nimham that the surveyor was on her land and that the survey should proceed -- particularly after she offered to pay the Indians for their cooperation.

Some of the Indians lurked in the vicinity, and sulked, and muttered threats. But Colden resumed his work and completed his line. It became famous in the region as the "parallel line," opposite the course of Wappingers Creek. It established the boundary of Madam Brett's property clearly and served for centuries as the basis for deeds to the land.

The Indian attack on Colden had been an act of direct defiance to the governor and a personal affront to the surveyor. The governor called another meeting. This time he convened the Indians and all three patentees of Rombout precinct. There was no reference to Colonel Lewis being present. Apparently the officials did not share Madam Brett's suspicion that he was responsible for the Indian action.

Philip Van Cortlandt, son of Stephanus Van Cortlandt, one of the original patentees, came to the meeting with Madam Brett. The Van Cortlandts did not occupy their Dutchess County land but lived in New York City and used their future manor house on the Croton River, below the Fishkill highlands, as a hunting lodge and office for their upstate business. Gulian Verplanck, a descendant of the third patentee, also was present. He had a house in the northern tract of the Rombout precinct.

Governor Burnet, in the gentle manner of a parent reluctantly reprimanding his wayward children, scolded the Indians for their action. He also proposed that the patentees give the Indians a gift as a gesture of goodwill.

The patentees were not particularly pleased by the suggestion. It was their money the governor was dispensing so generously. But each agreed finally to give £70 to the Wappingers, with the clear proviso that they were not obligated to make the payment, and were doing so only as a sign of friendship.

Van Cortlandt and Verplanck, living farther away from the Indians, were in no hurry to surrender their cash. Long after the agreement, they still had not paid up, but Madam Brett brought her £70 to Nimham in a meeting at the house of the Swartwouts, who lived near the Indian camping ground at Wicoppee.

Madam Brett reported that Old Nimham and his tribe were "fully satisfied," but that the sachem, apparently embarrassed and perhaps ashamed and fearful of retaliation for the trouble he had caused his friend, reminded her of the promise she had made that he and his children could live on her land unmolested for the rest of his life. Madam Brett renewed that promise.

For about thirty years thereafter, Madam Brett and Old Nimham lived in peace and harmony as friends and neighbors. Periodically, Madam Brett had problems with land

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grabbers and squatters – “mischievous white people” and “Negroe fellows,” she called them. These people would pay an Indian to sign a piece of paper he could not read, and then rewrite it as a ninety-nine year lease to a huge tract of land.

At times, Madam Brett recruited her family and friends to help her to deal with these people, as she did in the following letter, addressed to John T. Kemp, Attorney General of New York, on July 29, 1755:

“We, the undersigned subscribers, understanding that one Jack, a Negroe fellow, formerly being slave to William Green of this place, had made application to your worship in respect of land from the Indians, which by him and others of his accomplices and by that most wicked and dishonest seducement has we understand obtained a lease of said Indians by deluding them with strong liquor and making them drunk in order the better to obtain his lacivorous ends which after these Indians getting sober and considering what they had done by the crafty and subtel intreague of the fellow, they then with terror made the whole matter known to me Cth Brett who am the right and lawful owner of said land, which may appear evident by my patent. I only gave these Indians a verbal promise (as they were friends to me in a time of difficulty) to live upon my lands as long as I should think proper.

Judge Chambers, I question not, knows very well how and for what reason I came to give these Indians liberty to live upon my land.

To describe this fellow according to his deserts is more than tongue or pen can express or do. He has been whipped at the public whipping-post several times by order of the authority, which no doubt this fact can well evidence. He lived with his master borne Greene having companies of his neighbors’ Negroes rendezving with him etc. The authority thought proper to banish him and he has lived with Samuel Bayart at New York.

Catharyna Brett
Robert Brett
Theodorus Van Wyck
Henry Terbos
John Bayley”

These people never did any serious damage to Madam Brett. The title to her property was so secure that she never lost any large amount of land. And never again did Old Nimham cause her any concern.

After his death, about 1750, one of his sons, Sake, came to Madam Brett and asked her permission to sell the “improvements” on the place where he lived to the Swartwout family. The “improvements” could only have been his wigwam, his fireplace and his vegetable plot, but the sale would imply his departure, and for that, the Swartwouts were willing to pay £20. Madam Brett gave her permission.

The other son, Daniel, spent the rest of his life as a chief in search of a home for his people. The search took him in and out of the courts of Colonial America, and even, incredibly, across the Atlantic Ocean to England.

Daniel never abandoned the belief that the Wappingers were still the rightful

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owners of the land of their ancestors. He came to visit Madam Brett in 1761, and she wished him luck in his search, but at her age of seventy-four, she warned him sternly not to make any demands on her. She reported that Daniel seemed "satisfied" and actually thanked her for her courtesy. A year later, he was repeating his claim to her land in a meeting with the superintendent of Indian affairs.

That prompted Madam Brett to take pen in hand and to write -- in a Dutch-English-American idiom all her own -- a classic account of her relations with the Indians:

"Mrs. Catharyna Brett to Sir William Johnson

Fishkills August ye 26, 1762

Having been informed by Mr. Van Wyck when Your Honore was there Last Capt Nimham had Informed You that he had Land here and was kept out of his Right Sr I should a thought my Self happy to have waited on Your Honour at Mr. Van Wycks had I known on it and Given You a True account of the Whole affair which I have Many Evidences to prove; Sr I must Trouble You with the foundation of the Affair, Upwards of Thirtie Years Ago Sr I met with a vast Deal of Trouble by Some white people at Poughkeepsie, Sr Wee having the Oldest Patent of Any Round us, the Poughkeepsie People getting on that part by Division was allowed to me and Sold part of it I Sr Endeavoured to convince them in a Kind Manner but there was no Convincing of them and Sr there lived a Vast many Indians in this place, when we first Came here and this Company my adversaries Began to threaten me and I was Advised to Aject two of the white people they never Apeared but let Judgment go by default, I received the Writts of Possession, this Enraged them to Sett up the Indians Against me telling them that I had stollen their _____ Land, and they would but (y) it, but Old Nimham and two of his Sons Remained my friends the White People Could Not corrupt him he was an Honest Morral Creature, as ever I knew for he was an Instrument to protect me for I was in Danger of my Life, and I was obliged to Complain to Governor Burnet, who sent for the Ring Leader one Lewis, and also the Indians called a Councell on purpose, and Ordered an interpreter had Our Pattent and Indian Deed Read to them, the Indians Owned the Indian Names in the Indian Deed to have been the First Proprietors, the Governor Reproved them and made them Decease, and the Governor desired me to have that part Surveyed so that the Indians might be convinced of the Bounds. He gave them a Special Warrant on the Late Governor Colden who was then Surveyor General, who came himself in Order to do it, but was Soon Repulsed by a Company of Drunken Indians who were sent by them, who threatened to Break his Compass and was stoped. He Sent for me and I went too him and found Old Nimham and his two Sons With Mr Colden, Persuading of them to Lett it by Surveyed but in Vain and then I agreed with them, to pay them if they would see it Done, and with much Difficulty Mr Colden proceed and after it was Done, the Governor ordered the Indians to Appear before him, and Convinced them. And at that time there was Mr. Philip Cortland and Mr Guyline VerPlank present, and

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the Governor desired to make a present being they were Indians, and we the Patentees Mr Cortland Mr verPlank and myself promised we would but not as a Debt but to renew friendship. I Waited a Considerable time for my partners to join with me, and the Indians were uneasy and they Neglected so Long At Last I went and paid my part which amounted to £70, and I had Carried to Judge Swartwouts when Nimham came up with the Indians and they were fully satisfied.

then this Nimham put me in mind of a promise, that I had made him, concerning a place where he lived, that he and his children might Live on it as long as he Lived, that neither I nor my Children Should molest them I did in gratitude to Old Nimham, being he was a Friend of Mine, he never Asked me what quantity of land he should have but the place where he lived. and whenever he went off the Land was Mine. but Sr in a little time after, Some mischievous white people went to the Indians and hired Little Bitts of land and made them Give their Leases, then they put in what Quantity of Land they pleased and made their Leases for Ninety Nine Years. And this Old Nimham has been dead about twelve Years but his Children might have stayed on till this day but his oldest Son one Shake Came to me and Asked me Liberty to Sell the Improvement to one Capt Swartwout I opposed it at First and a Little after he came down Again with Seven or Eight more Indians for Liberty to Sell the Emprovement. I give him Leave to Sell the Emprovement, and he sold it for Twenty pound.

It being a Precarious time, I suffered all this, for fear of their setting up the Indians Against me. About a Year Ago Capt. Nimham was last with me, and I told him if the Whites owed him Any thing by promise he might Set it if he Could, I have Nothing to do with it, but from that time forward he should make no Demands there, and he Seemed to be Satisfied and thanked me and I have not seen him since. Honoured Sr I am Ashamed to Trouble your Honour with such a Long Scraul but hope you will Excuse me for Necessity Obligers me to it to prevent Trouble Sr I have heared that he has made a Complaint to Governor Monckton and he has ordered the Attorney General to Enspect into it; Sr if your Honour would be pleased to Order Some One to Enquire of the truth of what I have Wrought as there are many Evidences to proof it.

Sr I remain with my most
Humble Regards Sir/Your most
Obedient Humble Servant
Catharyna Brett"

If any white man in the British province of New York in the year 1762 could side with the Indians in a land dispute, or at least come to an honest and impartial opinion, it was the recipient of Madam Brett's letter, Sir William Johnson. He was an Irishman with high connections in the colony. His uncle, Peter Warren, was a captain in the British Navy, who married Susannah De Lancey of the New York De Lanceys. Sir William was also an Indian chief, known as Warraghiyagey.

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He came to New York as a young man and established himself in the Mohawk valley, west of Schenectady. He grew rich in the fur trade, acquired 99,000 acres of land, fathered innumerable white and red children, and was recognized by the British, the Americans and the Indians as the ruler of a vast area of the wilderness in northwest New York, reigning in primitive splendor at his forest mansion, Johnson Hall.

Madam Brett's letter to him traveled at the tortoise-like pace typical of Colonial mail. Traveling by sloop or horseback, in the pouch of a courier or in the pocket of a traveler, it finally reached Sir William, and more than a year later on September 20, 1763, he forwarded it to Cadwallader Colden, then lieutenant governor and acting governor.

Much as Sir William might have wished to befriend Daniel Nimham -- as he did generously on later occasions -- he took no side in this case. And Colden did not need to be reminded of the incitement of the Indians against himself, or of the correctness of Madam Brett's ownership.

Daniel Nimham did not press his claim, either in the Dutchess County courts or the governor's council in New York. And when another Indian made a claim against Madam Brett a year later, Colden wrote to the superintendent of Indian affairs, supporting Madam Brett's position:

"To the Honble Sir William Johnson Bart.

Spring Hill Oct. 8th 1763

Sir

I have your favor of the 20th of last Month by the Indian Hendrick Wamash who says that several people at Fishkill and Poughkepsay owe him from some pieces of Land in several places.

I told him that near 40 years since the Indians of Fishkill and Wappingers were heard by Governor Burnet on a like complaint at the House of Mr Haskol near the place since called New Windsor, that then everything was settled to the content of Nimham the Grandfather of this Man & of the other Indians to which this man had nothing to reply, but owned that he was then a boy and present at that meeting.

I told him that I could do nothing without hearing the Parties concerned for the doing of which he said he could not stay, and therefore I advised them to lay before you what they have to say upon that Land & on your writing to me I would call the parties concerned before me if there appear any just reason to you for believing there is anything still due to these People, & shall if the Council agree to it summon the persons indebted to the Indians to appear before the Council.

But I must desire you not to send the Indians to me without necessity, because it occasions an expense to me, for which I have no allowance.

You may assure yourself that no man can be more desirous to comply with your desire than

Sr Yr &c
C. Colden"

If, under English law, Daniel Nimham did not have a provable claim against

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Madam Brett, he did have an arguable case against one of the great families of the colony -- the Philipse -- and he pursued that with all the tenacity of a lean and hungry tiger.

It involved a strip of land along the Highlands, south of Fishkill Creek, from the Hudson "east into the woods to a marked tree." The land was bought from the Indians October 26, 1687, by Jan Roelof Sybrandt and Lambert Dorlandt, and sold by them June 16, 1697, to Adolphus Philipse, son of Frederick (Fat Freddy) Philipse, original owner of Philipse Castle at Tarrytown.

Two centuries later, the *New York University Law Quarterly Review*, which could hardly be considered biased in favor of the Indians, found that the Philipse claim was undoubtedly fraudulent. An article, "Land Cases in Colonial New York", published in 1942, pointed out that, by the simple expedient of ignoring the "marked tree," Philipse added about 200,000 acres to the small area that had actually been purchased from the Indians.

Daniel Nimham laid claim to that 200,000 acres, but the Philipse heirs brought suit in 1765 to eject the Indians from the land in dispute, and won without difficulty. The Wappingers appealed to Lieutenant-Governor Colden, but his council, sitting as a court of chancery, rejected the appeal, and Colden told the Indians gently: "Go home like good children and accept the verdict."

Undaunted, Nimham turned to the ultimate authority -- King George III. It required a frightening seven-week voyage by sailing vessel across the Atlantic, which was called in the Algonquin language, "Great Lake Without Limits." Nimham obtained letters of introduction from Sir William Johnson and sailed from Boston in June, 1766, with three Mohican kinsmen, three Indian women, a British army officer and an interpreter.

In England, the Indians did not see Prime Minister William Pitt, because he was busy with a cabinet crisis, and they were not received by King George, because the queen was giving birth to a princess.

But they returned to New York with letters from the Board of Trade, referring their case back to the governor, and from the Earl of Shelbourne, secretary of state, recommending "most serious consideration" of their claim.

After a second trial in 1767, the governor's council found again that the Indians had no title to the land. Nimham's case was closed.

In the meantime, too late to save the tribe, the Wappingers had become warriors. During the French and Indian War of the 1750s, in response to a call from Sir William Johnson, Nimham had taken his people to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, left the women, children and aged there with the Mohicans, and led 300 braves into combat in northern New York and Pennsylvania. In the Revolutionary War, the Wappingers fought on the side of the Americans.

Nimham's company, doing scout duty, fell into a British cavalry ambush on September 2, 1778, at Kingsbridge, in the Bronx section of New York City. Nimham, severely wounded, ordered his men to withdraw, and covered their retreat, saying, "I am an ancient tree. Let me die here." (He was about sixty years old.)

After the revolution, many of the homeless Wappingers accepted an invitation join the Oneidas, and went with them to the Midwest, lighting their council fire at Fox Lake, Wisconsin. No longer "men of the East," the Wappingers lost their identity as well as their ancestral land. They became known as "Stockbridge Indians." Their land was populated by descendants of Madam Brett and of her customers.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Madam Brett, the businesswoman, having found her calling, pursued her career with the passion of an inspired missionary. When she sold a piece of land, the deed was no ordinary commercial paper, the transaction no mere real estate deal. It was an act of benevolence, a declaration of friendship, an expression of hope, a promise of help and even a prospect of marriage. Madam Brett's customers often became her friends, allies and partners, practically members of her family, and indeed some of them actually did become her relatives by marriage.

After twenty years in business, she found her favorite customer. His name was Thomas Storm; he was her kind of man—a solid scion of an enormous Dutch-American family. Thomas was a third-generation American, whose grandfather, Dirck Storm, came to the colony from Holland nine years after Madam Brett's father, Francis Rombout. Thomas was ten years younger than Madam Brett. Like her, he was brought up in a Dutch household, swarming with children. He was one of eight children of Gregoris Storm, son of Dirck; and Thomas had seven sons and two daughters.

Thomas lived in Westchester County, to the south of Dutchess, where he held responsible positions as collector of Philipse Manor and elder of the Dutch Reformed Church at Philipsburg. He never gave up his home at Philipsburg, but he bought land from Madam Brett for members of his family.

The Storms were hardly adventurers, seeking the thrills of danger, or pioneers, courting the perils of the frontier. They were practical people, but daring enough to undertake a drastic solution to economic problems. Thomas was attracted to Rombout Precinct, Dutchess County, dangerous frontier country compared to Philipse Manor, Westchester County, because it offered a solution to a problem that confronted him—how to provide for the future of his children.

The Storms were accustomed to economic problems. Thomas' grandfather, Dirck, was born in Leyden, Holland in 1630 of a family of merchants, who were no strangers to adversity.

Dirck's aunt, Maria Storm, was married to Palamedes Stevens, a Pilgrim, who remained in Holland when his English friends went to America. Dirck's uncle, Laurens Storm, went into partnership with Stevens. They formed a company, Storm and Stevens, specializing in Holland cloth. The company became widely known in the export-import trade of Europe.

Dirck went to work in the company as a boy, but the depression of the 1660s in Holland forced the closing of the branch where he was employed. Even though it was his family's business, there was no other place for Dirck.

Like the Pilgrims and the Walloons, he turned to the New World. Dirck Storm, then thirty-two, with his wife, the former Maria Van Montfoort, and three sons, Gregoris, six, Peter, four, and David, one, sailed from Amsterdam August 31, 1662 aboard the sailing vessel *De Vos* (The Fox).

At first, life was not easy for Dirck in America. He rented a house owned by Elizabeth Van Driessen, wife of the Dominie, the Rev. Samuel Van Driessen, but Dirck apparently had trouble finding work, he was not able to keep up the rent, and after little more than two years, he moved in 1665 to a nearby, less expensive house on Beaver

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Street. Mrs. Van Driessen charged that he moved out "by stealth," and she sued him to collect the back rent.

In the new house, Dirck opened a tavern February 14, 1665, but that failed to provide for his growing family -- by now, there was a girl, Maria, two, as well as the three boys -- and it came as a blessing to them all when an old friend from Holland, Carel De Bevoise, town clerk of *Breuckelen* (marsh land), offered Dirck a job in 1669 as assistant clerk of the town across the East River at the tip of Long Island.

It was no wrench for Dirck to leave Manhattan -- the place had not been kind to him -- and it was an improvement for the family to settle in the little town that would eventually become the great borough of Brooklyn. Dirck had been there less than a year when De Bevoise died and Dirck became town clerk December 15, 1669.

While Francis Rombout prospered in the trade and politics of New York City, Dirck Storm made his way in the outskirts, in farming and civil service. While serving as town clerk of *Breuckelen*, he bought a farm at Bedford, inland on Long Island, and then another farm at *Nieuw Lots*, near the south shore of Long Island. He moved to *Nieuw Lots* in 1677, and became town clerk of nearby *Flakbosch* (Flatbush). In 1691, New York province created a new county on the west bank of the Hudson, just north of New Jersey, named Orange County after the Dutch royal house, and Dirck was invited to go there as county secretary and clerk of the court of sessions.

The distance from *Nieuw Lots* to his new post was only about twenty-five miles, in a direct line, but getting there involved a long difficult trip from Long Island, across the East River, around the tip of Manhattan and up the Hudson. And Dirck was sixty-one years old. But he did not hesitate.

Leaving his children, all now fully grown, in the security of Long Island, he made the trip by canoe and took office in a log courthouse at Tappan, in the forest on Sparkill Creek. He stayed there until 1703, when he retired at the age of 73.

While Dirck was away on the west bank of the Hudson, his children were attracted to a development on the east bank -- Philipse Manor, in Westchester County, directly across the river from Orange County. This was a curious personal empire, carved out of the wilderness by Frederick Philipse. It was compounded of Old World charm and medieval misery, but its ambiance was absolutely Dutch, and much more to the liking of the Storms than the increasingly Anglican society of Long Island.

Philipse himself was not Dutch. He traced his lineage back to the lords of the ancient kingdom of Bohemia in Middle Europe. He claimed to be the son of Viscount Felyps of Bohemia, and he was supposed to have been born November 6, 1626 in the Friesland province of northern Holland, to which his Protestant family fled to escape religious persecution.

Friendly and sympathetic researchers, seeking to authenticate his claim to noble origin, were never able to find any record of a Felyps family in the roster of Bohemian nobility. Nor could any record be found of his birth in Holland. Perhaps Frederick Philipse was a faker. According to family legend, he sailed to America in 1647 as a young man of twenty-one on the same ship that brought Peter Stuyvesant as the new director of the colony. The first actual record of Philipse in America did not come until May, 1653, when he was listed as appraiser of a house and lot in New Amsterdam. He signed his name *Vreedryck Felyps*. When New Amsterdam became New York, he changed his name to Frederick Philipse.

Originally a carpenter by trade, Philipse went into business. He began by making wampum, and trading it to the Indians for furs. He made more money, in various

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currencies, through commerce with the West Indies and the East Indies, and through the slave traffic with Africa.

He made two fortunate marriages to wealthy widows, Margaret Hardenbroeck, and after her death, Catharyna Van Cortlandt Dervall.

And he bought land -- land from the Indians, land from settlers, land from anyone who would sell. He amassed 90,000 acres along the Hudson in Westchester County between Manhattan and Dutchess County. His domain covered 200 square miles, bounded by Spuyten Duyvil in the south, Croton River to the north, the Hudson River on the west and the Bronx river to the east. In the names of their majesties, William and Mary, a royal patent was issued on June 12, 1693, creating the "Lordship or Mannour of Philipsborough."

Philipse took over a Dutch saw mill and built a manor house at Yonkers, where the Nepperhan River runs into the Hudson. He put up a grist mill and a stone house, which he called his "castle," at Philipsburg, where the Pocantico River joins the Hudson. These places were known then as "Lower Mills" and "Upper Mills."

It remained for Washington Irving, a century later, to name this region "Sleepy Hollow." He bought the Van Tassel farm on the Hudson three miles south of Philipsburg, gussied up the house until, as he wrote, it was "as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat," and he called it "Sunnyside." The region was the locale for *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

The industrious Dutch farmers, clearing the forests, tilling the fields, tending the cattle, building houses and barns and feeding eight to ten children, never would have thought of the place as sleepy, nor of themselves as the dull denizens whom Washington Irving dubbed the "Sleepy Hollow Boys." There was a deep cove, at the mouth of the Pocantico River below the Upper Mills, that provided docking facilities for the Hudson River sloops. Early Dutch settlers called this bay "Die Slapering Haven," which might have given Irving the inspiration for "Sleepy Hollow."

This was a feudal domain. Philipse invited settlers, but only as tenants. Eventually, they numbered about 1,100, belonging to 270 families. Philipse owned the land. He collected rents. He ground flour and shipped it in his own fleet. The ships brought back goods, which he sold to the farmers. Philipse presided over society. He administered justice, civil and criminal, except for cases of treason, which were reserved to the governor. Philipse was the Lord of the Manor.

The Storms liked Philipse Manor. They lived among Dutch people. They spoke Dutch. They ate Dutch food, a lot of it. They played Dutch games. They worshiped at the Dutch Reformed Church. The church records were kept in Dutch -- the first register being compiled by Dirck Storm. Late in life, long after his retirement, he was invited by the congregation on November 3, 1715 -- at the age of eighty-five -- to write "The First Record Book" of the church.

Most of the Storm family had moved from Long Island to Philipse Manor by 1695. Among the first tenant farmers there, they became a numerous brood -- Dirck's eight children, at least thirty-five grandchildren (they kept complete records of the sons' children, but not of the daughters'), and the great-grandchildren beginning to arrive.

Dirck's oldest son, Gregoris, lived at Philipsburg. Two other sons, David and Pieter, lived about ten miles down the Hudson in Yonkers. After Dirck retired in 1703, he went to live with the two sons in Yonkers.

On April 17, 1716, Dirck signed the eighth and last book of records of the church. It was the last record of him. Ironically, after all the records he had kept -- lists of members

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of the church, elders and deacons, dates of marriages and baptisms, accounts of finances and charities -- no notice could be found in later years of Dirck's death. It could only be assumed that he died in 1716 at the age of eighty-six.

Dirck's oldest son, Gregoris, had died five years earlier at the age of fifty-five. Thomas Storm, grandson of Dirck and son of Gregoris, had been born at Philipsburg in 1697. He was fourteen years old when his father died, nineteen when he lost his grandfather. Thomas Storm lived to assume the role of patriarch of the family.

Thomas was a contemporary of the second lord of the manor, just two years younger than the second Frederick Philipse. While the second lord was being educated in England, Thomas worked on his father's farm and studied his lessons at home in Philipsburg.

At the age of seventeen, an unusually early age for men of his family to wed, Thomas married Christina Van Weert, daughter of Gerrit Van Weert of Harlem, whose wife, the former Catherina Conklen, came from Philipsburg. After the second lord returned to rule over his domain, Thomas became his associate as Collector of the Manor.

What he collected was rent, and doing so was largely a social occasion. There were two rent days a year on the manor, one at Yonkers and the other at Philipsburg. The tenants gathered at the manor house or the castle, delivered their rent and were offered a feast. The minimum rent was two fat hens. It went up, depending on the size of the farm and its distance from the river. £7 a year for 200 acres was considered high.

As collector, Thomas Storm presided over the delivery of the rent. He presented the proceeds to the overseer, William Aartse, who was the principal manager of the manor. Thomas was then free to join in the feast with the other farmers.

He referred to his property as "my improvement on Philipse Manor in the County of Westchester, which I hold under the Honorable Colonel Frederick Philipse." By "improvement," he meant any house, barn or other structure he placed on the land. He was recognized as the owner of the "improvements," but his lease on the land was for his lifetime only, and upon his death, the land reverted automatically to the lord of the manor. It was possible to leave the land, as well as the "improvements," to a descendant, with the consent of the lord, but in such cases, it was customary to pay one-third of the assessed value of the land to the lord.

Thomas had eight children by his first marriage. His wife, Christina, died about 1734, after twenty years of marriage. Four years later, Thomas took his second wife, Annetje Maijyer Van Sickles, a widow with three children of her own. Soon they had another child, Isaac, seventh and last son of Thomas.

How could Thomas provide for all these sons? He had only one farm on Philipse Manor, and he was not even the owner of the land there. Then, he heard about Rombout Precinct from a young nephew, Johannes Storm, second son of his brother Pieter, who moved to Fishkill about 1735.

Johannes gave the family glowing reports of a region of abundance, where a man could own his land and pass it on freely to his heirs. It was the answer to Thomas Storm's problem.

He made contact with Madam Brett. He scouted her vast domain carefully, like a modern woman seeking bargains in a supermarket. Surprisingly, he chose a tract at the eastern end of Rombout Precinct.

This was high land, hilly and rocky, heavily forested and not easily accessible, lying about fifteen miles inland from the Hudson, near the headwaters of Fishkill Creek, where the stream was too shallow for navigation.

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The woods were dense with virgin oak, hickory, ash, maple and other trees. Wild animals roamed the hills, bears, wolves and panthers. Some men, red or white, who prowled the woods like cut-throats and robbers, could be more dangerous than the animals.

But the woods were also good providers. There were deer, small game and birds for the table, and beaver, otter, fox, mink, muskrat, skunk and raccoon for the fur trade.

Some of the land had been cleared by a tenant farmer, John De Long. It was fertile and well-watered. A few other families lived in the vicinity, the Ferdons, the Rosekrans and the Yeomans. Much more land was available, and Storm already contemplated expansion of his property. Moreover, the price was right.

On May 12, 1739, he paid Madam Brett £320 for 406 acres. Three years earlier, Theodorus Van Wyck had paid £830 for 900 acres, almost one pound an acre, but his purchase was lower down on Fishkill Creek, nearer the Hudson.

Madam Brett assembled a goodly group to complete the Storm sale. Her friend, Matthias Du Bois, and Thomas Storm's son, Gerrit, served as witnesses. There was a surveyor to trace the boundaries of the property, a lawyer to provide the legal language, and a scrivener to do the writing.

The scrivener brought a goose quill pen, two pieces of sheepskin parchment, each thirty-three inches wide and twenty-nine inches long. The paper bore no letterhead, but the two copies were cut across the top in identical curving lines, in accordance with the ancient English practice of "indenture." By placing the copies together and combining their lines, their authenticity could be confirmed.

The scrivener, scratching his pen as neatly as possible across the parchment, wrote in a fine script:

This indenture made the twelfth day of May in the twelfth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second, by the Grace of God and Great Brittain, France and Ireland, King Defender of the Faith, etc., and in the year of our lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty nine, Between Catharina Brett of the Fishkills in Dutchess County in the province of New York, *widow*, of the one part, and Thomas Storm of the Manner of Philipsburgh in the county of Westchester in the province of New York, Yeoman of the other part.

Witnesseth:

"That the said Cartharyna Brett for and in consideration of the sum of £320 current money of the Province of New York to her in hand paid by the said Thomas Storm...by these presents doth grant... ALL that certain tract or parcel of land situate, lying and being in Rombout Precinct in Dutchess County aforesaid..."

The boundary line began at a white oak on the south bank of Fishkill Creek, marked with three notches in the bark on the east and west sides of the tree. From there, the line crossed the creek to another white oak, marked like the first one, and proceeded north for 6,500 feet past a "stooping" black oak and stakes and rock piles, all serving as markers. The line turned west for 4,500 feet, then south to the creek and back along the stream to the starting point. The scrivener wrote:

"Containing 409 acres and 105 rods, whereof three acres and 105

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rods is excepted for a wild or Bogg meadow lying in the said boundaries, SO THAT THIS TRACT OF LAND IS TO CONTAIN JUST 406 ACRES."

This first transaction with Thomas Storm was carried out by Madam Brett in a strictly businesslike manner. The deed contained none of the sentimental remarks that she often attached to her sales. And the deed concluded with a stern note, "that the said Thomas Storm . . . shall not at any time erect or build any water grist mill for grinding of corn or any other kind of grain in or upon any part of the said premises."

The scrivener having completed his writing, Madam Brett signed the deed in neat characters, like the tracks of a tiny bird, at the bottom of the page. The lawyer made a small puddle of warm red wax beside her signature and stamped it with the seal of the province. Thomas Storm kept one copy of the deed. The other was forwarded to Henry Livingston, clerk of Dutchess County.

Thomas Storm did not take personal possession of his new property, preferring to stay in the comfort and security of Philipse Manor while his sons performed the pioneering in Rombout Precinct. The oldest son, Thomas, Jr., then twenty-four years old, had married Rachel Buys two years before the purchase and their first child, Christina, was born in the year of the purchase. They, too, preferred to remain in Philipsburg. But the second son, Gerrit, seventeen years old when he witnessed the sale and still single, was willing and eager to work on the land that one day would be his.

With his brother Goris, fifteen, he built a log cabin on the bank of Fishkill Creek at a narrow elbow in the stream. They put a plank bridge over the water to join their land. As they grew older, they cleared the forests and planted fields. They erected houses and barns, connected them with paths and surrounded them with fences.

But the father had not completed his acquisitions. Four-hundred acres were hardly enough to satisfy seven sturdy sons, even if some of them were not interested in the territory. Four years after his first purchase, Thomas Storm returned to Madam Brett. Again, he explored her property and he chose more good earth, this time south of Fishkill Creek.

On May 17, 1743, he paid Catharyna Brett £220 for two parcels of land — one of 237 acres, the other of seventy-six acres. The price was similar to that of his first purchase, £320 for 406 acres. Again, the company assembled, surveyor, lawyer and scrivener, Madam Brett and Thomas Storm. Again, the witnesses were Matthias Du Bois and Gerrit Storm, now twenty-one years old.

"This indenture made the seventeenth day of May in the sixteenth year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second, by the Grace of God and Great Britain, France and Ireland, King Defender of the Faith and so forth," the scrivener wrote.

This tract began "at a large white oak tree marked with six notches and a cross, standing at the southwest side of a small pond." The line skirted the pond, bypassing rocky ledges and low marshes until it reached the property of a neighbor, Micah Rogers.

At the end of the deed, Madam Brett added the hope "that he, the said Thomas Storm, his heirs and assigns, shall and may at all times hereafter freely and quietly possess, enjoy and keep the said tract." It was her benediction on the accomplishment of Thomas Storm's dream.

He was now the owner of 719 acres of fine farmland, free and clear, his to pass on

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

to his heirs fully, as he might see fit. Two of his sons, Thomas Jr. and Jacob, died before Thomas. Five sons remained to be provided for, as well as his wife and two daughters.

A quarter of a century after his first purchase from Madam Brett, Thomas Storm traveled from Philipse Manor to Rombout Precinct on a June day in 1763. According to family legend, he sat on the porch of the first Storm house in Dutchess County at the elbow in Fishkill Creek where his oldest son, Gerrit, lived. There, in legal language enlivened by his personal style of punctuation and spelling, he wrote his will, distributing his possessions. But first, he wished to make his peace with the Lord.

"In the name of God Amen," he wrote, "this twenty eight day of June in the third year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord King George the third anno domone one thousand seven hundred and sixty three, I Thomas Storm of Philips manner and County of Westchester and Province of New York Yeoman being well in health of Body and of perfect mind and memory thancks be given to God therefore.

"Knowing it is appointed for all men once to die and the Time nothing more uncertain do make and ordain this my last Will and Testament."

To his wife, Annetje, he left one-third of his "movels," apparently meaning "movables," or cash. "Also I give to her what she brought to me, and the new furniture, and the homespun blankets of all sorts, and the swine, and the choice of the best rume in the house, and the keeping of a horse, and a cow, and provisions for her," he wrote.

The two daughters, Catharyna and Engeltje, were left "an equal right with my sons in the cattle and sheep and household goods."

The inheritances were granted to the sons in accordance with their ages. The two oldest, Gerrit and Goris, shared the first purchase from Madam Brett. The next son, Abraham, received the larger parcel of the second purchase except for ten acres of woodland within its boundaries. The fourth son, John, was given the smaller parcel of the second purchase plus the ten acres of woodland. The youngest son, Isaac, was left no land in Rombout Precinct, but he was willed the "improvements" on the Philipsburg property.

His estate in perfect order and his life's ambitions fulfilled at the age of seventy-two, Thomas Storm died at Philipsburg December 28, 1769.

The provisions of his will were carried out with one notable exception. Abraham, then forty-three, being well settled in Philipsburg, had no desire to move to Dutchess County and he did not want Madam Brett's land. His younger brother, Isaac, twenty-nine, had married Elizabeth Losee of Fishkill four years earlier and he wanted to make his home in Dutchess County.

These two brothers exchanged inheritances, Abraham taking the farm in Philipsburg, and Isaac getting the share of the second purchase from Madam Brett.

One brother, John, moved to Pleasant Valley, farther north in Dutchess County. Gerrit, Goris and Isaac lived out their lives in Rombout Precinct. They bore seventeen children. They transformed the primeval forest at the farthest end of Madam Brett's property into a thriving community.

Later generations called it Stormville.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"To Mr. Hennery Levenston at His hous at pocipsing May the 13.1749"

So began a letter which Madam Brett wrote from her home at Fishkill Landing on May 13, 1749, to a man whose name was Henry Livingston and whose house was at Poughkeepsie. In an age when spelling was hardly a fine art, Madam Brett possessed a positive genius for misspelling.

The man she so addressed cut a wide swath in the provincial society of Dutchess County. For more than a half-century, he served as county clerk from 1737 to 1789. In addition to keeping the county records, he managed a small, but prosperous farm of eighty acres, containing 600 apple trees, 500 locust and 300 peach trees. He owned a two-story mansion of eight main rooms with a lawn stretching fifty yards to the Hudson River and he was the head of a large family of six daughters and four sons.

Of Scottish ancestry, he was born at Kingston, farther north on the Hudson, and he lived to be eighty-five. Originally, he was a surveyor by profession, but he was appointed county clerk at the age of twenty-three, and settled in Poughkeepsie two years later. He married Susanna Conklen of the Philipsburg Conklens, who moved to Poughkeepsie in the 1720s, and provided wives for Thomas Storm and his son, Goris. Livingston's Scottish-Irish descendants married into the great Dutch families of the county, the Storms, Van Cortlandts and Brinckerhoffs.

For all his fame, influence and fortune, Livingston did not awe Madam Brett. He and his wife were her friends, but twenty-seven years her junior, and she started her letter to Livingston with some Motherly advice, in her own special Dutch-English literary style, about his wife's health. The writing, at first glance, might have left the recipient "pusseld," but if Livingston read it aloud, he would have found the meaning perfectly clear.

"Sir

after my Kind Respacks tou your selfs en T yours this Comes tou
Retorn you thancks for your Favars tou your spous Sr en I had a Litel
descors about her disorder sie has bin affected weht wyle sie had that
Dimnis on her syht en accorden tou wat axpirens I haff had I tack that
the esstirrix is the prinsibel cors thes drops arr vary goud tou supres
the vapers my Dater has Resifd grat Rilyffe by thacken of them I houpe
to mersy the will be bless to you her the are to bie thacken 25 drops
en the morning as sone as sie Ryses on two or three sponfulls of water
for som days en alsoo at nyht when sie gous tou Bad I advysd Mrs.
levenston tou Drinck way tou Couler her Blod en tou Bring her tou a
nateral Body witcts I houpe sie has had bennifit by becaus when sie
begins tou Thack this Drops sie soud not bie vary Costiff or Bond
but being Pretie naterel not Lous neither but pretie naterell en then
thacken the Drops duly mornings en Evenings the well ciepe her soo
after a Wicks thacken of them sie mack yuse half wyn tou thack them
en the are passentter tou thack en I would not haff her bie afraid of a

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drop or tou moor for after two or three thymns taken them sie may thack forthie the wont hert for en case of a Collick wan may thack sextie."

Having dispensed her medical advice, Madam Brett proceeded to the real estate business at hand.

"Sr Mr. Everitt was hier this morning hie is tou geff mie sex fatt fols for quit en I Resarf half thie myns en hie is tou geff mie a morrigide on the Land for the tou other pamants wan half I must Resife now end the other half of the hole is tou bie en four pamants wan half of that half the neaxt may en the other half the nax may Follerng en for the securitie of the same I thack a Morrigeed en a Bond en Sr Mr Everit en I am agrid that hie is tou haff but 11-hondrid ackers I am tou Ciep the Remander out of the Remander is Laid out 59 acars By Johannes Swartwout enfor moses DeGraff 19 ackers more en for Mr Tappen 100 ackers en for Mr Piter DeBous en Arie Van Vliet about 20 ackers it Lys yust By Arrie Van Vlits possessyon mr De Bous was Ron this out before en the Remander sr witcts I haff Resarfd I am tou tack en proporsine as I haff sold tou hiem goud en Bad as I haff sold to hiem as it sall bie agriyd en wan pies if it can suet for I would haff it weht tember on for I haff thacken som plans alridy I Donbeliff Mr Everit en I sant Dessagrie

"en Sr I mack Bold tou remynd you wans more tou Guard mie en that pint that I only sell 11 hondrid ackers wehten Mr Coldens Lyne that en kays that the Land accorden tou the patant sold be bie fond broder thn that must bie my Ryet still en his is tou giff the quit en preporsin of the patant en sex fatt fols tou mie my son will Sr Explan my crall tou you otherways you wold bie pusseld I Remane Sr weth do Respect tou your selfs en spous Sr your

vary ombell
Sarvant
Catharynn Brett

Sr you will bie plisd tou Lett know."

Presumably, the letter was delivered to Livingston by one of Madam Brett's sons, with a bottle of medicine and her permission to translate her "crall" into recognizable English. It could be assumed that Livingston, as county clerk, made official note of her sale of 1,100 acres of land to Everitt for an annual quit-rent of six fat chickens and a down payment of half the price, the other half to be paid in four installments, with Madam Brett reserving the right to half of any minerals found on the property.

But if Livingston was "plisd tou Lett" Madam Brett know of his receipt of her letter, his reply was not preserved for posterity and no such deed could be found later in the records of the Dutchess County clerk's office. It may be that the sale was not consummated or that the deed was lost. But Madam Brett did complete many other transactions from then on and the records were carefully kept.

The Storm family remained among her good customers. Gerret Storm, eldest surviving son of Thomas, on May 25, 1754 bought 123 acres adjoining his father's land

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for £159, 18 shillings. Gerret followed his father's practice of excluding from the purchase five acres of "wild meadow" lying within his boundaries. Madam Brett made her usual reservation of one-half of "all mines or minerals found" on the property.

In a collection of eighteenth century records, published by the Dutchess County Historical Society in 1938,¹⁵ a list of abstracts of deeds showed these sales by Madam Brett:

April 9, 1751

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Dutchess County
Grantee: Thomas McNeall, clothier, of Dutchess County
Consider'n: £15
Quit-rent: To be paid annually
Land: two parcels; one of 2 acres, 3 roods, 17 perches, and another of twelve acres lying on the south side of the Fishkill and adjoining another land, formerly granted by Grantor to Grantee

Aug. 20, 1752

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Dutchess County
Grantee: Benjamin Hasbrook, tailor, of Dutchess County
Consider'n: £457
Land: parcel of 308 acres, together with 3 acres allowed for roads; adjoining land of William Scutt

March 23, 1759

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Dirick Hegeman, blacksmith, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: £151, 4 shillings
Quit-rent: to be paid annually on March 25, to the Grantor or her heirs in proportion to the patent
Land: parcel of 108 acres on the north side of the Fishkill, adjoining the road that leads from the landing at Hudson's River to Poghquaick and adjoining land of Abraham Adriance and Cornelius Wiltsie

May 16, 1763

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Fishkill
Grantee: Mathew Du Bois Jun., brewer, of Rumbout
Consider'n: £58, 12 shillings
Land: one equal third part of a parcel called the Round Meadow being lot no.1

The occupations of her customers made it clear that Madam Brett was doing more than merely satisfying her own need for cash by selling her land. She was providing services to those who bought the land by bringing in as their neighbors, people who could perform the tasks essential to a primitive, growing society. She may not have been conscious of this as an objective. Certainly, at no time did she ever enunciate a studied formula for construction of a balanced community. But instinctively, like a mother, she assembled the elements necessary for a large, happy family.

Her supreme accomplishment in business was the creation of a cooperative that

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combined her resources with those of twenty-one of her friends, neighbors and customers to provide transportation, storage and marketing facilities for all of them. The company was called the Frankfort Storehouse. It stood for a century before and after the War of Independence as a monument to American business acumen.

Ownership of the company was vested in twenty shares, divided among the twenty-two partners. Listed first among the partners was Madam Brett, holding one full share. Others owning one share were three members of the Van Wyck family, Cornelius, Abraham and Theodorus Jr.; two Brinckerhoffs, John and George; two Carmans, John and Joshua; Thomas Storm, Abraham Bloom, Cornelius Wiltsie, and Benjamin Hasbrook. Two men, Theodorus Van Wyck and James Duncan, held two shares each. Half-shares were owned by Jacob and Isaac Brinckerhoff, Abraham, Isaac, and George Adriance, Lawrence Losee, Henry Ter Boss and John Van Vlackra.

All were described as yeomen except for Madam Brett, widow; Duncan, merchant; Abraham Van Wyck and George Brinckerhoff, merchants; and Van Vlackra, blacksmith. All lived in Dutchess County, except for Thomas Storm of Philipsburg, and two merchants, Abraham Van Wyck and George Brinckerhoff of New York City.

On August 6, 1743, the partners bought 123/4 acres of land from Madam Brett's son, Francis, and his wife, Margaret, paying £28, 13 shillings, 9 pence in cash. The deed described the land as a "parcel of 123/4 acres in Rombout Precinct, adjoining Hudson's river near a place called Ekeranton's plantation, and bounded at the south and east and north by law of Francis Brett." The borders of the property were marked by two large rocks at a place known as Willet's landing, or the lower landing, at the mouth of Fishkill Creek near Madam Brett's mill.

The partners drew up articles of organization starting:

"Whereas persons mentioned have lately bought a lot of land of Francis Brett which said lands binds on the North River at a place commonly called Willet's Landing, containing about eleven acres... we the partners do hereby...agree to have a large store house built with a dwelling house adjoining it..."

It was accepted custom of the time for businessmen to be as reckless with arithmetic as scribes were with spelling and what was described carefully in the deed of sale as 12 3/4 acres became "about eleven acres" in the articles of organization. The storehouse was built and each partner was allotted space. There, he delivered his produce for shipment to New York and he received the goods that came up the river by sloop.

The partners held annual meetings to elect officers -- two managers, a clerk and boatman -- and to transact other business, such as setting rates for passengers and freight. After several years of operation, freight charges were established at 9 pence a cask for flour, 1 shilling a barrel for pork or beef, 3 pence a bushel for salt, "and all other things in proportion." Passengers paid 2 shillings 6 pence for the trip between Fishkill Landing and New York.

The annual meeting for 1763, the year before the death of Madam Brett, produced these minutes:

"January ye 14th, then chose Abraham Adriance for Clarc for Franckfords store at the meeting at Richard Van Wyck's for the

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insuing year. Daniel Ter Bush boatman for the year sixty-three until the first of may in the year sixty-four at £12 and keep the Store House, Dock and Dwelling House in sufficient Repair, and the said Daniel Te Bush is to fence the orchard land and bringh in a just account and the said Bush is to receive his pay out of the Rent Don by major voat, and the said Bush is to frate as useyel and find salt as useyel Chose managers for the insuing year -- Theodores Van Wyck and Colonel John Brinckerhoff to manige and rectiphy all affairs, and to Demand the Land that peter Bogardus has in possession. By major voat. The meeting to be at Richard Van Wyck the first day of January if Sunday then the next Day."

The Boatman and general factotum, Daniel Ter Bush, must have been a relative, perhaps a son, of Henry Ter Bos, owner of a one-half share in the Frankfort Storehouse when it was organized twenty years before this annual meeting. Members of this family, with numerous mutations in the name, were among Madam Brett's earliest associates in Dutchess County. John Terbos served as a witness to the transfer by her and her husband of 110 acres to the carpenter, Robert Dengee, in 1715 and 1716. Daniel Boss, a tenant farmer, purchased his land from Madam Brett in 1727. Jost Bush, who signed "X," his mark, was witness to a sale to Benjamin Hasbrook, the tailor, in 1758. Daniel Ter Boss, presumably one and the same as the boatman Daniel Ter Bush, witnessed a sale by Madam Brett to Mathew Du Bois Jun., the brewer, in 1763, the year of the annual meeting.

The two men named as managers of the storehouse, Theodore Van Wyck and Colonel John Brinckerhoff, apparently were Theodorus Van Wyck, who bought his land from Madam Brett in 1745, and the John Brinckerhoff, who made his purchase from here in 1747, both among the original partners in the storehouse.

The clerk, Abraham Adriance, was evidently a relative of Isaac Adriance, a weaver from Queens County, Long Island, who made his first purchase of land from Madam Brett in 1743, the year the storehouse was formed. Isaac Adriance became a half-share partner in the Frankfort company, and added to his purchase from Madam Brett in 1755, bringing his total land to 300 acres. Abraham Adriance, the clerk, was a witness to a sale by Madam Brett of 567 1/2 acres to one George Adriance in 1742.

Some of these families, Van Wyck, Brinckerhoff and Adriance, would figure prominently later in the early history of the American republic. In the mid-eighteenth century, their leader and mentor was Madam Brett.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Not everyone possesses a personal highway to heaven, but Madam Brett had hers. Later, it would be designated state Route 52, connecting Beacon, New York and Carmel, New York, but then it was known as "Madam Brett's road," and it ran from her home to her church.

It was a pleasant ride by coach for about five miles along the north bank of Fishkill Creek, where there was no stream to ford, no bridge to cross. It began at her house in Fishkill Landing and went east through the woods, up and down some hills but none so steep as the Fishkill Mountains nearby, to the church in the town of Fishkill at the junction of the Kings Highway.

Every Sunday morning, Madam Brett traveled her road to church and every Sunday afternoon, after the service, she rode home for dinner with her family. Worship was one of the most important parts of her life – more significant to her, certainly, than her business transactions and perhaps as important as her home and family. After her husband's death, Madam Brett knew many men, but her only romance was her religion.

She and her husband donated the land on which the church was built and it was their concession to the convenience of their friends and neighbors – as well as their recognition of the great role of religion in the lives of all of them – that the church was situated in Fishkill. As the donors, they might have insisted that the building be located at Fishkill Landing near their home and near the Hudson, which was the principal route for travel at the time. But Fishkill was in the center of the farms along Fishkill Creek astride the Kings Highway that was becoming more and more traveled and would one day replace the river as the main route between New York and Albany.

The congregation began building the church in 1716, two years before Roger Brett drowned. After her husband's death, Madam Brett contributed to the cost of construction.

It took seven years of hard work to put up the square, stone structure with arched, shuttered windows, steep sloping tiled roof and soaring belfry spire. The freeholders and the slaves brought the stone, three feet thick, by ox teams from the fields. They cut the beams, eighteen inches square, from Madam Brett's woods. She helped to pay for the red brick trim to decorate the outer walls.

At first, after the church was completed, the pulpit was often empty because of the difficulty of finding a pastor in Holland or in Germany or among the Dutch ministers in America. The first pastor was the Rev. Petrus Vas, who came down the river when he could, from his regular parish at Kingston. Then, the Rev. Cornelius Van Schie answered a call to Holland and served as resident pastor for seven years. The Rev. Benjamin Meynema followed him from Holland and stayed for ten years. He resigned in 1755.

The Dutch Reformed religion was not intended as a form of entertainment and the church was not made for comfort. There was no heat. Worshipers brought their own footwarmers. The floors were sanded to prevent fire and to absorb the expectorations of the tobacco-chewing men. The sand was changed by the sexton once a month on Communion Sunday.

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The freeholders sat on hard wooden benches. The slaves perched in galleries along the side walls. Their illumination was provided by candlelight.

The pastor preached in Holland Dutch from a high, goblet-style pulpit opposite the entrance. His Bible rested on an oaken board.

For all its austerity, this was not a poor church. The Communion set -- a tankard, two gold-lined goblets and two plates -- was made of sterling silver.

Finally, after three years without a pastor, the congregation found the Rev. Jacobus Van Nist, a young man who had been educated in America. He answered the call from the elders and the deacons to preach on alternate Sundays in the churches of Fishkill and Poughkeepsie. The sister churches, twelve miles apart, had been founded in the same year, 1716, and from the beginning had shared pastors.

The pastor's salary was £70 a year (\$300), payable semi-annually. He was promised a suitable dwelling, kept in good repair; an ample supply of firewood, piled by his house; a garden, properly fenced; an orchard with 100 fruit trees; a pasture, a horse, bridle and saddle, and £3 a year for incident expenses. Away from home, he was guaranteed free board and lodging.

Van Nist was given his choice of living in Fishkill or Poughkeepsie, "or thereabouts as shall be found most fit and to his best satisfaction." The parsonage at Poughkeepsie, where the previous pastors had lived, was run down, having been vacant for three years.

While repairs were being made, Van Nist was invited to stay at the home of Paul Schants, principal storekeeper of Poughkeepsie, whose combined house and general store stood next door to the church, on the south side of Main Street between the church and the red wooden schoolhouse. On the other side of the church was the stone courthouse. Across the street were a few houses, stores and offices, the latter occupied largely by lawyers.

"Paul's Store," as it was known throughout the county, sold the best of local produce and goods brought up from New York. He had a wife, two sons, one daughter and half a dozen slaves. The Schants' daughter, Rebekah, was still going to school.

After Van Nist moved in, Rebekah did much of her studying in his room which was not surprising in a crowded house. Her parents scolded her at times for bothering him when he was trying to prepare his sermon. But he assured them that Rebekah was no bother, and that she always left the room when she realized that she was interfering with ministerial matters.

As she grew older, they went out for walks. As she became taller and her voice developed, they stood together in the front of the church, leading the congregation in hymns. He was six feet, two inches tall, and her head came to his shoulders. They made a handsome couple.

But for nearly two years, he preached and she studied and they sang, and there was no indication that their relationship would become any more serious.

Then, one weekend when it was the minister's turn to preach in Fishkill, he invited Rebekah to accompany him. This involved their being away from home for three days and two nights, but Rebekah's family had full confidence in the Dominie and offered no objection. In fact, they helped her up onto the pillion behind his saddle.

After a day's ride, stopping for lunch at the home of Major Elias Van Benschoten, they came to the large house of Colonel John Brinckerhoff on the creek outside Fishkill. The Brinckerhoffs were expecting the minister since he usually stayed with them on the Saturday nights before his service in Fishkill.

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Their daughter, Martha Jane, welcomed Rebekah. That evening, the minister took the girls rowing on the creek, and they admired his strength and skill in navigating the narrow stream. After nightfall the Dominie led the Brinckerhoffs and their slaves in prayer in the parlor and they retired early.

The next morning, at breakfast, Van Nist proposed a kind of game that he often played with people who put him up for the night. Each one would recite a verse from the scriptures, as memory would permit, and the minister would improvise morning prayers on their subjects. The Colonel and Mrs. Brinckerhoff and Martha Jane recalled some lines from the Psalms. When Rebekah's turn came, she produced a stunner:

"For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

The biblical text registered so clearly that the Brinckerhoffs still recalled it many years later. The lesson could not have been lost entirely on Van Nist.

After breakfast, he put Rebekah up on her pillion and they rode a couple of miles into town to the Fishkill Reformed Church. After the Sunday service, they rode another good mile down the Kings Highway to the Van Wyck homestead, a mansion by Colonial standards, large enough to serve later as headquarters for the quarter master general of the State of New York during the Revolution. In Madam Brett's day it was the residence of Cornelius Van Wyck whose daughter, Margaret, was married to Madam Brett's son, Francis. Van Nist and Rebekah spent the night with the Van Wycks.

Monday, on the way back to Poughkeepsie, they stopped at Peter Montfort's farm for lunch and conducted services in his barn for people living too far out in the country to attend church regularly in Poughkeepsie or Fishkill. The Dominie preached a sermon, Rebekah led the singing, and then, his religious duties done for the weekend, Van Nist surrendered to romance.

It was a warm spring afternoon. They had ridden far and were tired. They stopped in a clearing under a great oak tree to rest and to wait for the day to cool. It was there that Van Nist proposed marriage, or suggested that he would propose, or indicated that he might propose, or at least mentioned matrimony in some manner or other.

Whatever he said, he did not press his suit immediately. When they arrived back in Poughkeepsie at nightfall, the Schantses welcomed the couple. But there was no mention of a marriage.

A week passed and Van Nist preached in Poughkeepsie. Another week passed and he went to Fishkill for the service there -- alone. While the Dominie was still away, Rebekah told her mother that he had proposed during their previous trip. Mrs. Schants hastened to tell her neighbors the good news. When Van Nist returned to his room, Rebekah told him what she had told her mother. The minister emerged from the room and asked Schants for his daughter's hand in marriage. The wedding was set for June 5, 1760.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

On the morning after the wedding, Madam Brett went back to her home and her work. At the age of seventy-three, or at any other age, it would never occur to her to retire.

In that year, 1760, the value of the land she still owned was assessed by the tax committee of the county supervisor at only £20. The assessment, as a basis for taxation, was much lower than as in later years, than the real value of the property. She still held half a dozen farms, but by then she had sold nearly all of the 28,000 acres she inherited.

Her last recorded sale was made three years later. On May 16, 1763, Matthew Du Bois Jr., brewer, paid Madam Brett £58.12 for a lot described as "one equal third part of a parcel called the Round Meadow." This final sale to a Du Bois symbolized the constancy of Madam Brett's life. Her original tenant had been Peter Du Bois, Ye Frenchman, who farmed the "island" in the Hudson at the mouth of Fishkill Creek. Now, the Du Bois-Rombout-Brett cycle, more than a century old, was complete.

If Madam Brett had sought consciously a fitting close to her business career, she could hardly have found a more suitable transaction than this small, simple sale to a Du Bois. More than 100 years before in the mid-seventeenth century, while her father, Francis Rombout, a French-speaking Protestant Walloon, was leaving Catholic Liege for Holland, Jacques Du Bois, a French-speaking Protestant Huguenot, was fleeing Catholic France for Holland. Du Bois came from the ancient province of Artois in northern France, later to be called the department of Pas-de-Calais. He lived in Leyden, Holland, the hometown of Madam Brett's customers, the Storm family, and, like the Storms, he engaged in the cloth trade. Jacques Du Bois went to America in 1675, twenty years after Rombout, and settled at Wiltwyck, later Kingston, a trading post on Rondout Creek on the west bank of the Hudson north of Poughkeepsie. He withstood the rigors of the New World for only one year. He died at Wiltwyck in 1676.

His son, Peter, born at Leyden March 17, 1674, and only two years old at his father's death, was brought up in Wiltwyck. He was married October 12, 1697, to Jannetje Burhans, a native of the Dutch province of Brabant. They moved in 1707 to Fishkill Landing where Madam Brett found them when she took possession of her land and gave them life tenancy. Peter farmed the land, and fathered a large family—seven sons and four daughters—large even by the generous Colonial standards. He died June 16, 1737 at the age of sixty-three and is buried in the cemetery of the Dutch Reformed Church in Fishkill.

Madam Brett's last customer, Matthew Du Bois Jr., was the son of a cousin of Peter. While Peter was founding the Du Bois family on the east bank of the Hudson, another branch of the clan, descendants of his father's brother, Louis, was spreading along the west bank. Matthew Du Bois, Jr., a grandson of Louis, followed Peter to the east bank and carried on the Du Bois tradition of doing business with Madam Brett.

After the wedding, Jacobus and Rebekah Van Nist went on a honeymoon trip. This was not the common practice for members of a rural society, in which young couples more often had to stay home and take care of their farms and animals, at a time when travel was difficult. But Jacobus was entitled to an annual summer vacation and he and Rebekah were accustomed to travel. They went by coach and boat to New Jersey,

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

where Jacobus was brought up and where he still had many friends. On their way back, they stopped in New York City and visited Dominie Du Bois, who had performed their marriage ceremony.

When they returned to Poughkeepsie, the parsonage which Van Nist had never occupied in the first two years of his ministry, being perfectly comfortable in the Schants home, was ready for them. It was at Swarthwoutsville between Fishkill and Poughkeepsie – an ideal location for the minister serving both communities.

Van Nist resumed his normal rounds, preaching in each church on alternate Sundays and their first winter in their new home went quickly for the young couple. But that was also to be their last winter together. Their married life was destined to last less than a year.

Late in March 1761, on a Saturday in spring when the Hudson valley weather can be as dangerous as on any day in winter, Van Nist left home alone on horseback for Fishkill to preach the following morning. A cold rain was falling. The horse sank to his fetlocks in the mud and the going was slow. Anxious to reach Fishkill before nightfall, Van Nist made no stops to rest.

Suddenly, the horse stumbled and stopped, trembling. Van Nist dismounted and set out to walk the sick steed to his destination. As they struggled through the mud in deepening dusk, the rain turned to snow, thick, wet flakes that blinded Van Nist and soaked his clothes.

Finally, he made his way to the farm of Johannes Ter Boss on the outskirts of Fishkill. Groping in the darkness, he hitched the horse to a post and knocked on the Ter Boss' door. Mrs. Ter Boss answered. Startled to see the minister standing in the snow, dripping wet, she hustled him into her warm kitchen. Ter Boss brought dry clothing for the minister and ordered the horse put in the stable, rubbed and covered with blankets. Van Nist sat by the kitchen fireplace, shivering.

Mrs. Ter Boss brought him some supper, but Van Nist, suffering from chills, aching head and limbs, could not eat. He wanted only to go to bed. Mrs. Ter Boss put a warming pan filled with coals in the bed, gave him a glass of wine and he fell into a sound sleep.

Sunday morning, Van Nist seemed well. It was a clear, bright day with a warm sun melting the snow. At breakfast, Van Nist looked over the notes for his sermon. After breakfast, he rode to church in a phaeton with Ter Boss.

Van Nist preached his sermon in Dutch, in the usual, serious, deliberate style that the congregation expected of him. His subject was drawn from Psalms, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous, verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth." It was a satisfying sermon for the self-righteous people of Fishkill. The parishioners noticed nothing untoward about the minister.

That night, back at the Ter Boss house, he fell violently ill, went to bed and slept badly. In the morning, Ter Boss called a doctor, who found that the minister had a fever and provided some medicine. Tuesday, the doctor diagnosed the illness - typhus.

A messenger rode posthaste to Poughkeepsie with a note from the doctor to Paul Schants, telling him of Van Nist's sickness, not disguising the seriousness of the case. Paul went to Rebekah with the message and they hastened together to Fishkill.

"Rebekah," Van Nist said weakly, putting out his hand to her as she entered his room, weeping. He tried to comfort her, telling her, "The Lord is the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

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Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

On the morning after the wedding, Madam Brett went back to her home and her work. At the age of seventy-three, or at any other age, it would never occur to her to retire.

In that year, 1760, the value of the land she still owned was assessed by the tax committee of the county supervisor at only £20. The assessment, as a basis for taxation, was much lower than as in later years, than the real value of the property. She still held half a dozen farms, but by then she had sold nearly all of the 28,000 acres she inherited.

Her last recorded sale was made three years later. On May 16, 1763, Matthew Du Bois Jr., brewer, paid Madam Brett £58.12 for a lot described as "one equal third part of a parcel called the Round Meadow." This final sale to a Du Bois symbolized the constancy of Madam Brett's life. Her original tenant had been Peter Du Bois, Ye Frenchman, who farmed the "island" in the Hudson at the mouth of Fishkill Creek. Now, the Du Bois-Rombout-Brett cycle, more than a century old, was complete.

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Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

tend his store, but Rebekah stayed on at the Ter Boss house. At last, the fever was too much. According to family legend, Van Nist's final words were to his wife: "We will meet in heaven."

He died on April 10, 1761, at the age of twenty-six.

The funeral was held three days later in the Fishkill church with congregations coming from Poughkeepsie, Hopewell, New Hackensack and other nearby communities. Church history records that the funeral procession left the parsonage at 10 a. m. April 13, 1761, headed by clergymen, elders, deacons of the churches, and the pallbearers. When the first mourners reached the church, several miles away, the last mourners were still leaving the parsonage.

It was not the custom to deliver a eulogy at funeral services in the Dutch church, but the Rev. Hermanus Meier, pastor of the Esopus church, who came down the Hudson to preside, offered a brief prayer.

"God took him in the very springtime of life," Dominie Meier mourned, "but his work is done, and the loss to his people is irreparable."

At the head of the grave, they placed a tombstone with the inscription:

"Jacobus Van Nist, preacher of the Holy Gospel in Poughkeepsie and Fishkill, died the 10th of April, 1761, in his 27th year."

After only ten months and five days of married life, Rebekah went home to Poughkeepsie with her parents. She lived there for the rest of her life and was buried in her family's plot in the cemetery beside her father's store.

Jacobus and Rebekah Van Nist were separated by death.

The Dominie and Madam Brett were to be joined.

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Catharyna Brett went about the business of dying as she lived, calm, confidently, efficiently and devoutly. The prospect of death did not distress her. It was a firm, definite proposition that she could prepare for and deal with, although she was somewhat disturbed by the lack of advance notice of a specific time for closing the deal. She wanted to be sure that, when the time came, her accounts would be in good order.

He had a large brood to provide for. Of her four sons, only Francis survived. Thomas, her first born, had died in 1714 at the age of nine. Rivery passed on in 1729, aged seventeen. Robert, born in 1709, lived on to middle age, but died sometime before 1763. Francis, the second son, born in 1707, carried on through the American Revolution, attaining the age of eighty.

Francis was well married to Margaret Van Wyck, daughter of Cornelius Van Wyck, first of that pioneer family to come to Dutchess County and one of Madam Brett's earliest major customers, purchaser of 959 acres on Fishkill Creek in 1733. Francis and Margaret had eight children—Katherine, Cornelius, Hannah, Francis, Phoebe, George, Theodorus and Margaret.

Madam Brett's only other married son, Robert, had taken for his wife the former Catharyna Du Bois, daughter of Peter Du Bois, the first settler of Rombout Precinct and Madam Brett's original tenant-for-life. Robert left his widow and five children—Matthew, Francis, Sarah, Robert and Rombout.

So when Madam Brett sat down to write her will, she had to remember one living son, two daughters-in-law and thirteen grandchildren, as well as two slaves, Molly and Coban, her personal servants, whom she called fondly her "wenches."

But first of all, it was incumbent upon her to remember the Lord, her God. The date was March 14, 1763. She wrote:

"In the name of God, Amen. I, Catharyna Brett of Fishkill, in Dutchess County and in the Province of New York, Widow, being aged and inform in body but of sound and disposing mind memory and understanding. — thanks be given to Almighty God for the same, and calling to mind the certainty of death and the uncertain time thereof do make and declare this my last Will and Testament in manner and form following, that is to say, first and principally I recommend my precious and Immortal Soul into the Hands of Almighty God who gave it, and my Body to the earth to be decently interred at the discretion of my Executors hereafter named in hope of a Glorious Resurrection and as to such Worldly estate wherewith it hath please God to bless me with I give, devise and dispose thereof in manner and form following."

To her son Francis she left her homestead, her single full share in the Frankfort Storehouse, £100 in cash, "the Negro woman Molly," five farms and one-half of the remaining estate.

"I also order that if my wench Molly should be sold, that she have the liberty of

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

Chusing her own Master with whom she will live," Madam Brett wrote.

The other half of the estate was divided among Robert's children, who also received collectively, "the wench called Coban." But if they ever decided to sell Coban, Madam Brett provided, "She is to have the liberty of Chusing her own Master."

Madam Brett named as executors of her estate her son Francis, John Brinckerhoff of Fishkill and Ebenezer and Peter Du Bois of Fishkill Landing.

While Madam Brett was writing her will, she was scarcely preoccupied with the prospect of death. This was hardly a period of depression in her homestead. Indeed, while she was writing the will, this was a time of gaiety and the house bustled with activity. For Madam Brett's favorite granddaughter was getting ready for her wedding.

On April 6, 1763, less than a month after the will was signed, Hannah Brett, daughter of Francis Brett, was married to Henry Schenck, son of Judge Abraham Schenck. It was a suitable match for the young lady who would eventually inherit Madam Brett's homestead. (Her younger sister, Margaret, married Peter A. Schenck).

Henry Schenck was a descendant of Sir Roeloff Schenck, who sailed with Henry Hudson as supercargo on the *Half Moon* in 1609, on the voyage of discovery of the Hudson River. Henry's father, Abraham, was a judge of the Court of Common Pleas of King's County, Long Island, and county representative in the state legislature. Henry's mother was the former Elsie Vandervoort, daughter of another prominent family of Dutch settlers.

This wedding must have contrasted greatly with the marriage carnival that Madam Brett had attended three years earlier in Poughkeepsie, uniting the Rev. Van Nist and Miss Schants. This time, there was no compulsion to invite the boisterous people of Poughkeepsie and there was no occasion for raucous competition between the towns of Poughkeepsie and Fishkill.

The Bretts and Van Wycks of Dutchess County, the Schencks and Vandervoorts of King's County, their relatives and friends, could come together quietly in the family homestead of the bride for a dignified wedding ceremony.

No account of the marriage was left for posterity, as had been done in Poughkeepsie, but it was recorded in Brett family annals that the bride wore a dress of striped silk, evidence of the elegance of the occasion. More than two centuries later, a faded strip of silk was still displayed in a glass case in the Homestead, a piece of the bride's wedding gown, preserved as a souvenir of the marriage.

No sooner was Hannah married than Madam Brett was back at work again although she had complained in her will of being "aged and infirm in body," and she was near the end of her allotted seventy-seven years. It was little more than a month after the wedding that she sold the "Round Meadow" to Matthew Du Bois Jr. on May 16, 1763, her last sale of land recorded by the Dutchess county clerk.

She went on with her purchases at the Frankfort Storehouse. The last notations on the storehouse account of Catharyna Brett were made on December 22, 1763, "sundries" for £1.16.3 and on January 2, 1764, "sundries" for 1.14.8.

Then, suddenly, Madam Brett was dead.

Exactly when, how or why she died was, incredibly, not recorded. For a family that preserved her playthings and kept her business accounts and cherished her letters, it was an unimaginable oversight. Just as no one ever saved a picture or description of her, no one ever bothered to register the date and circumstances of her death.

Madam Brett's great-great-great-great-granddaughter, Mrs. Alice Crary Sutcliffe,

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

included a biographical sketch of her celebrated ancestor in *The Homestead of a Colonial Dame, the story of Madam Brett's House*, published in 1909, but said of her death only that it occurred in the spring of 1764.



Left: Alice Crary Sutcliffe, great-great-great-great granddaughter of Madam Brett, on the steps of the Brett Homestead. (Photo courtesy of the Melzingah Chapter, DAR)

Right: The Rev. Robert Fulton Crary and Mrs. Crary (nee Agnes Boyd van Kleeck) at home in the Teller House, now the Madam Brett Homestead. Mrs. Crary was the great-great-granddaughter of Roger and Catharyna Brett. Dr. Crary, a Protestant Episcopal clergyman, was the grandson of Robert Fulton of steamboat fame and was an artist who painted many of the pictures which hang in the house today. (Photo courtesy of the Melzingah Chapter, DAR)

The Melzingah Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which acquired the house from the family in 1955, published a pamphlet in 1957 entitled "Madam Brett Homestead." This also reported that she died in the spring of 1764, and gave her the wrong age – eighty, when she was actually only seventy-seven.

The historian of Dutchess County, Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, devoted many pages to Madam Brett in her book, *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776*, but failed to provide many statistics on the grounds that Mrs. Sutcliffe had already done so.

Henry Noble MacCracken, the late president of Vassar College at Poughkeepsie and a professional historian, praised Madam Brett highly in his *Old Dutchess Forever!* and wrote at length about her letters and her will, but he made no reference at all to her death.

Her first epitaph, an official notice and a fitting close to the career of a successful businesswoman, appeared in the *New York Gazette*. It said:

"I have to desire all persons to have their accounts settled with the estate of Catharyna Brett, deceased, of Fishkill or they may expect trouble from John Brinckerhoff, Francis Brett, Ebenezer Du Bois, Peter Du Bois, executors"

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

A less commercial, more imposing memorial awaited Madam Brett in the centuries to come.

She was buried under a simple tombstone in the cemetery beside the west wall of the Dutch Reformed Church in the village of Fishkil, close to the grave of Dominie Van Nist.

This was Madam Brett's own church. She had given the congregation seven and a half acres in 1716 when the church was founded. The original building faced Madam Brett's Highway, the road from Fishkill Landing to Fishkill. The entrance was from the street side and a center aisle led to the pulpit on the opposite wall. It was a living, growing church.

Twenty-five years after Madam Brett's death, the building was enlarged. The entrance was changed to the right side and a second story, surmounted by a steeple, was added. Atop the steeple was a gilded weathercock that kept watch over the village.

The west wall was extended; the pulpit was switched to the west side and lo, it came to rest directly over Madam Brett's grave.

One-hundred and thirty years after her death, the congregation placed a stone tablet beside the pulpit in 1894, engraved:

In Memoriam
Madame Catharyna Brett,
widow of
Lieutenant Roger Brett, R. N.,
and daughter of
Francis Rombout,
a grantee of the Rombout Patent.
Born in the City of New York, 1687,
Died in Rombout Precinct, Fishkill, 1764.
To this church she was a liberal contributor
and underneath its pulpit her body is interred.

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman



Madam Brett was a generous contributor to the First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of Fishkill. Her grave lies under the pulpit extension shown in the photograph. According to the custom of the times, ministers and benefactors were buried close to the church wall. When the Altar wall was extended in the reconstruction of 1785-95, it completely covered her grave.

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

DEEDS

Records of land transactions concerning the Rombout Patent were recorded by the Dutchess County Clerk.

Dutchess County Historical Society has published *Eighteenth Century Records of the portion of Dutchess County, New York that was included in Rombout Precinct and the original Town of Fishkill - Dutchess County, New York* - collected by William Willis Reese and edited by Helen Wilkinson Reynolds. *Collections of the Dutchess County Historical Society, Volume VI, 1938.*

Following is a list of abstracts of the deeds in the sequence in which they were recorded:

Liber 1, page 10

May 23, 1720

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill
Grantee: James Hussey, yeoman, of the Fishkill
Consider'n: &75
Quit-Rent: May 1st yearly, one-half bushel of winter wheat
Land: Parcel of 100 acres, now occupied by James Hussey; on the north side of the Fishkill and on the south side of the road leading from the Fishkill to the mill of Catharyna Brett; with a house
Privileges: Mowing grass, cutting hay in the meadow, pasturage and range for cattle and horses, cutting timber in the woods
Reservations: All rights in the Fishkill; trees suitable for the saw mill of the Grantor
Witnesses: A. D. Peyster, John Jones, Henry Van Derburg

Liber 1, page 13

May 25, 1718

Grantors: Roger Brett, gentleman, of Dutchess County, and Catharyna, his wife
Grantee: Richard Townsend of Hempstead, Queens County
Consider'n: A sum of money
Quit-Rent: Three couple of good fowels, yearly
Land: Parcel of 500 acres on the east side of Hudson's River, northward of Ye Highlands, within the bounds of land no in the possession of Grantors
Witnesses: John Beatty, Robert Dingee

Liber 1, page 16

October ___ 1715

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

Grantors: Roger Brett of the Fishkills and Catharyna his wife
Grantee: Robert Dengee, carpenter, of Hempstead on Long Island
Consider'n: One year's work by grantee for grantors; and an agremnt by grantors to convey title to 100 acres of land at expiration of said year of work

Appended Clause
June 30, 1716

Land: Parcel of 110 acres on the east side of Hudson's River, on the north side of the Highlands and on the north side of the first landing place beyond Peter Du Bois

Quit-Rent: four good fatt groun fowles every year at Christmas
Witnesses: John Terbos, John Jones

Liber 1, page 63
March 11, 1726/27

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of the Fishkill
Grantee: George Cooper of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &75
Quit-Rent: one-half bushel good and merchantable winter wheat, to be paid yearly on the feast-day of the birth of our Lord Christ, at the mansion-house of the Grantor.
Land: Parcel of 100 acres in Dutchess County on the east side of Hudson's river, near a place called by the Indians, pacghquaick, about three English miles southerly from Francis De Long's

Liber 1, page 67
March 11, 1726/27

Grantor: George Cooper, labourer, of Dutchess County
Grantee: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of the Fishkill
Consider'n: &70
Land: As per liber 1, page 63
Title: Conveyed to George Cooper by Catharyna Brett March 11, 1726/27
Condition: If George Cooper pays to Catharyna Brett &38.1.0 on or before May 17, 1730, this deed of none effect
Witnesses: Piter de Booyes, Jacob D. Peyster, Henry Van Der Burgh

Liber 1, page 106
Sept. 25, 1727

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of the Fishkill
Grantee: Daniel Boss of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &100
Quit-Rent: one-half bushell good and merchantable winter wheat, yearly, at

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

the feast of the birth of our Lord Christ
Land: A farm in Dutchess County, now in the occupation of Daniel Boss
Title: by lawful inheritance
Privileges: To mow and cut grass within the neighboring woods; to cut timber, wood and fencing and carry away with wagon or shay for the sole use of the farm; only as the same wood remain unsold or otherwise appropriated
Witnesses: Jacob De Peyster and Jacobus Swartwout

Liber 1, page 167

April 9, 1733

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, daughter and sole heir of Francis Rombout, of the first part, George Clarke, Esq., secretary of the Province of New York, of the second part
Grantee: Cornelius Van Wyck, yeoman, of Hempstead, Queens County
Consider'n: 5 shillings; under Act for Transferring Uses into Possession.
Quit-Rent: One peppercorn, yearly, if demanded
Land: Near a certain river called the Fishkill; part of Francis Rombout's share of a large tract; adjoining lands of Henry Terboss and Henry Rossekranke Parcel of 959 acres, 1 rood
Witnesses: Cornelius Wiltsie and William Burch

16

Liber 1, page 170

April 10, 1733

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, of the first part, George Clarke, esquire, secretary of the province of New York, of the second part
Grantee: Cornelius Van Wyck of Hempstead, Queens County
Consider'n: &704.18.0
Quit-Rent: "such an equal share and proportion of yearly quitt-rent as is due and payable to the King's Majesty, his successors, for ye quantity of 959 acres, 1 rood
Land: as per Liber 1, page 167
Exceptions: one-half part of all mines and minerals and any right to build a grist-mill
Witnesses: Cornelius Wiltsie, William Burch

Liber 1, page 181

July 9, 1718

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, Widow, of the Fishkill, of the first part, George Clarke, esq., secretary of the province of New York, of the second

Catharyna Brett: Portrait of a Colonial Businesswoman

part
Grantee: Dirck Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Flushing, Queens County
Consider'n: five shillings; under Act for Transferring Uses into Possession
Quit-Rent: one peppercorn yearly, if demanded
Land: a lease for one year of two parcels in Dutchess County; one of 400 acres near the Fishkill, near Casper's Runn and Townsend's line; one of 1,600 acres near the Fishkill, and adjoining land of Johannes Terbos
Title: part of the share in the larger tract of Francis Rombout, late of the City of New York, merchant, deceased; the grantor of the first part being Francis Rombout's daughter and sole heir.
Witnesses: S. Clowes, and Gerhards Clowes

Liber 1, page 183

July 10, 1718

Grantors: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fiskill, of the first part, George Clarke, esqu., secretary of the province of New York, of the second part
Grantee: Dirck Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Flushing, Queens County
Consider'n: &800
Land: as per Liber 1, page 181, with provisions for future adjustment of the acreage
Reservations: all rivers, creeks and runs of water; the grantee to build no dams nor mills thereon
Witnesses: S. Clowes, Gerhard Clowes

Liber 1, page 290

Oct. 7, 1738

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill
Grantee: Cornelius Willsey, of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &74
Quit-Rent: yearly, on 2th of March, according to the Patent
Land: parcel of 74 acres, on the north side of the Fishkill, southwest of a parcel that Cornelius Willsey formerly purchased of Catharyna Brett
Exception: one equal half-part of all mines or minerals or ore of metall that shall at any time be found

Liber 2, page 12

May 15, 1736

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill, daughter of Francis Rombout, merchant, late of the City of New York, dec'd

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Grantee: Theodorus Van Wyck, Jun., of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &830
Quit-Rent: in accordance with the Patent
Land: parcel of 900 acres, on the east side of Hudson's River, at the north side of the Highlands, on the south side of the Fishkill
Exceptions: one equal half-part of all mines or minerals found; also reserved, the right to build a mill
Title: by inheritance from the Grantor's father
Witnesses: Mary De Puyster, Edward Antill, A. Van Wyck

Liber 2, page 17

July 1, 1741

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of Dutchess County
Grantees: James Willson and Charles Ellis of Dutchess County, and James Stringham of Ulster County
Consider'n: &85
Land: two parcels; 101 acres in all; on the south side of the Fishkill
Exception: one-half of all mines or minerals found
Witnesses: Frances Brett, Barnard Lynch

Liber 2, page 24

July 15, 1741

Upon failure of payment by grantees, deed as per Liber 2, page 17 of no effect

Liber 2, page 482

May 19, 1743

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill.
Grantee: Isaac Adriance, wever, of Queens County, on Nasau Island.
Consider'n: &210
Land: parcel of 250 acres, lying north and south of the Fishkill in Rombout Precinct at the edge of the lowlands of Thomas Storm.
Title: by inheritance
Reservations: To the Grantor all rights in the Fishkill; the Grantee not to build a mill thereon.
Witnesses: "Theodorus Van Wyck, son of Cornelius," Abraham Adriance.

Liber 2, page 489

May 13, 1745

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow and relique of Roger Brett, of Rombout Precinct.
Grantee: Theodorus Van Wyck, yeoman, of Rombout.
Consider'n: &364.

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Land: two parcels at Wickopee in Rombout; one of 193 acres, two roods, 21 perches; one of 28 3/4 acres.
Title: by inheritance
Witnesses: Robert Brett, Isaac Adriance

Liber 2, page 531

Aug. 6, 1743

Grantors: Francis Brett, yeoman, of Rombout Precinct, and Margaret, his wife.
Grantees: Catharyna Brett, widow; Cornelius Van Wyck, yeoman; James Duncan, merchant; John Brinckerhoof, yeoman; Theodors Van Wyck, yeoman; Theodorus Van Wyck, Jun., yeoman; Abraham Bloom, yeoman; Cornelius Wiltsie, yeoman; Benj. Hasbrook, yeoman; all of Rombout; Abraham Van Wyck, merchant, of the City of New York; George Brinckerhoff, merchant, of the City of New York; John Carman, yeoman of Beekman Precinct; Joshua Carman, yeoman, of Beekman Precinct; Thomas Storm, yeoman, of Phillipsburg; Jacob Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Rombout; Lawrence Losee, yeoman, of Rombout; Isaac Brinckerhoff, yeoman, of Rombout; Henry Ter Bos, yeoman, of Rombout; George Adriance, yeoman, of Rombout; John Van Vlackra, blacksmith, of Rombout; Abraham Adriance, yeoman, of Rombout; Isaac Adriance, yeoman, of Rombout.
Consider'n: &28.13.9
Land: parcel of 12 3/4 acres in Rombout Precinct; adjoining Hudson's River near a place called Ekeranton's plantation, and bounded at the south and east and north by land of Francis Brett.
Title: by inheritance
Rights: The rights of the grantees are in the following proportions: 1/20th to Catharyna Brett, Cornelius Van Wyck, John Brinckerhoff, Theodorus Van Wyck Jun., Abraham Bloom, Cornelius Wiltsie, Benj. Hasbrook, Abraham Van Wyck, George Brinckerhoff, John Carman, Joshua Carman and Thomas Storm. 2/20th to James Duncan, Theodorus Van Wyck. 1/2 of 1/20th to Jacob Brinckerhoff, Lawrence Losee, Isaac Brinckerhoff, Henry Ter Bos, George Adriance, John Van Vlackra, Abraham Adriance and Isaac Adriance.
Witnesses: John Jones, Hendrig Bush

Liber 3, page 59

April 15, 1755

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Isaac Adriance, yeoman, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: &36.16.6
Land: parcel of 49 1/2 acres in Rombout Precinct, adjoining land formerly

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conveyed by said Grantor to said Grantee
Title: letters patent to Coll Courtland, Rumbout and co.
Witnesses: Peter Tipple, and Elisabeth Berken

Liber 3, page 110

May 25, 1754

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Garret Storm, yeoman, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: &159.18.0
Quit-Rent: yearly, in proportion to acreage, and in accordance with the patent
Land: parcel of 123 acres, adjoining land of Thomas Storm
Title: Patent granted to Francis Rombout and co.
Exceptions: 5 acres of wild meadow and 1/2 of all mines or minerals found
Witnesses: John Brinckerhoff, Wyllem Coiper

Liber 3, page 114

May 12, 1739

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkills
Grantee: Thomas Storm, yeoman, of the manor of Phillipsburgh in the county of Westchester
Consider'n: &320
Quit-Rent: yearly to His Majesty, in proportion to acreage, and in accordance with the Patent
Land: parcel of 409 acres, 105 rods in Rombout Precinct, formerly in the possession of John De Long; adjoining the Fishkill
Title: patent granted Oct. 17, 1685
Exceptions: a parcel of 3 acres, 105 rods for a bog meadow, making the parcel conveyed to amount to 406 acres and excepting one equal half part of all mines or minerals found and excepting a right to build a water-grist-mill
Witnesses: Matthias Du Bois, Gerret Storm

Liber 3, page 119

May 17, 1743

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Thomas Storm, yeoman, of the Mannor of Phillipsburgh, Westchester County
Consider'n: &220
Quit-Rent: yearly to His Majesty, in proportion to acreage and in accordance with the patent
Land: two parcels, one of 237 acres, 35 rods, and one of 76 acres 125 rods; adjoining land of Thomas Ferdon, William Rosekrans, and Nathaniel

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Yeomans
Title: by inheritance under the patent to Francis Rombout and Co.
Exception: 1/2 of all mines or minerals found
Witnesses: Matthias Du Bois, Gerret Storm

Liber 3, page 125

April 9, 1751

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Dutchess County
Grantee: Thomas McNeall, clothier, of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &15
Quit-Rent: To be paid annually
Land: two parcels; one of 2 acres, 3 roods, 17 perches, and another of 12 acres; lying on the south side of the Fishkill and adjoining another land, formerly granted by Grantor to Grantee
Privilege: a right-of-way from said two parcels through Catharyna Brett's land on the south side of the Fishkill into the Great Road that runs by Aaron Van Vlaker's and John Brinckerhoff's houses, which road is to enter into the Great Road near the bridge commonly called the Mudd Bridge
Title: by inheritance
Witnesses: John Jones, Francis Brett

Liber 3, page 253

March 23, 1759

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widdow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Dirick Hegeman, blacksmith, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: &151.4.0
Quit-Rent: to be paid annyally on March 25, to the Grantor or her heirs in proportion to the patent
Land: parcel of 108 acres on the north side of the Fishkill, adjoining the road that leads from the landing at Hudson's River to Poghquaick and adjoining land of Abraham Adriance and Cornelius Wiltsie
Witnesses: Thomas Schoonmaker, Gysbert Schenck

Liber 3, page 301

May 18, 1742

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: George Adriance, yeoman, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: &531.17.0
Land: two parcels, one of 541 acres and one of 26 1/2 acres; part of a tract granted to Col. Courtlandt and co.
Title: by inheritance

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Exception: 5 acres, allowed for the highway that runs through parcel
Witnesses: Gerret Storm, Cornelius Van Wyck Jun., Abraham Adriance

Liber 4, page 32
Oct. 26, 1736

Grantor: Catharyna Brett of the Fishkills
Grantee: Johannis Rosekrans of the Fishkills
Consider'n: &182
Quit-Rent: one peck of good merchantable wheat to be paid yearly to the
Grantor or her heirs
Land: parcel of 203 acres on the south side of the Fishkill
Title: by inheritance
Exception: 1/2 of all mines or minerals found
Witnesses: Jacobus Rosekrans, Robert Brett

Liber 4, page 358
Aug. 20, 1752

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Dutchess County
Grantee: Benjamin Hasbrook, tailor, of Dutchess County
Consider'n: &457
Land: parcel of 308 acres, together with 3 acres allowed for roads;
adjoining land of William Scutt
Title: by inheritance, the land being part of a tract granted to Col.
Courtlandt and co.
Exception: 1/2 of any mine or minerals found
Witnesses: Theodorus Van Wyck, Francis Brett

Liber 4, page 362
April 20, 1758

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Rombout Precinct
Grantee: Benjamin Hasbrook, tailor, of Rombout Precinct
Consider'n: &52.10.0
Land: parcel of 34 1/2 acres adjoining tract of 200 acres already conveyed
by said Grantor to said Grantee
Witnesses: Francis Brett, Jost (his X mark) Bush

Liber 5, page 123
May 16, 1763

Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of Fishkill
Grantee: Mathew Du Bois Jun., brewer, of Rumbout

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Consider'n: &58.12.0
Land: one equal third part of a parcel called the Round Meadow, being lot no. 1
Witnesses: Corneles Newkerck, Daniel Ter Boss, Matthew Brett

Liber 6, page 114
March 14, 1737
Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkill
Grantee: Robert Brett, yeoman
Consider'n: &500
Quit-Rent: 3 bushes of wheat, yearly
Land: parcel of 1,400 acres on the north side of the Fishkill; with a dwelling-house; technical description
Title: by inheritance
Reserved: 1/2 of all mines or minerals found
Witnesses: William Barker, Lucas Wyncoop

Liber 9, page 81
April 10, 1747
Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of ye Fishkills
Grantee: John Brinckerhoff, yeoman, son of Derrick Brinckerhoff of ye Fishkills
Consider'n: &255
Land: parcel of 300 acres; adjoining the east side of the road which leads from the Jew doctor to Verplanck's mills; near the Jew doctor's house; adjoining the road from Pochquecik to the landing or place of transportation; adjoining lands of Jacob Brinckerhoff, Isaac Brinckerhoff, Julian Verplanck and Judge Swartwout
Witnesses: Robert Brett, Benjamin Meynema, Thomas Little

Liber 9, page 100
Nov. 6, 1737
Grantor: Catharyna Brett, widow, of the Fishkills
Grantee: John Brinckerhoff of the Fishkills
Consider'n: &20
Land: parcel of 31 acres; adjoining lands of Cornelius Losee and Daniel Brinckerhoff
Witnesses: William Verplanck, Theodorus Van Wyck

Liber 13, page 367

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May 30, 1738

Grantors: Catharyna Brett of the Fish Kill, widow, and Francis Brett of the Fish Kill, gentleman, of the first part; and Isaac De Peyster of the City of New York, merchant, of the second part

Grantee: Jacob De Peyster of the City of New York, of the third part

Consider'n: &356.8.5 paid to the parties of the first part, and one penny to the party of the second part

Land: To the party of the third part, several parcels: (1) a parcel called the "Island;" formerly in the possession of Peter Du Bois, tenant for life; (2) 31 acres and nearly 1/2 acre, adjoining Hudson's River and Fish Kill bay; (3) 109 acres near the Island; adjoining Hudson's River and Fish Kill Bay; technical description; formerly in the possession of the said Peter Du Bois, tenant for life; (4) 1/3 of a meadow of about 5 1/3 acres; between the second and third parcels, above; located at low-water mark of river and bay; (5) a parcel of "nearly" 222 acres; adjoining the parcel of 100 acres which the said "Jacobus" bought of George Cooper; technical description

Witnesses: John Flewwelling, Isaac Dolson

Liber 14, page 557

July 12, 1743

Grantors: Catharyna Brett of the Fishkills, widdow, of Roger Bret of the City of New York, merchant, deceased; and Isaac De Peyster, of the City of New York, merchant

Grantee: Abraham De Peyster of New York City, merchant

Consider'n: 5 shillings; equity; mortgages

Whereas: On April 9, 1709, Roger Brett and wife, Catharyna, daughter and sole heir of Francis Rombout, late of the City of New York, deceased, mortgaged to William Peartree of the City of New York for 200 pounds, all that messuage or tenement and 300 acres of land, lot lying and being in Dutchess County on the east side of Hudson's River, just above the highlands, and also the grist mill standing and being near unto said messuage or tenement and with the same used and occupied; all which premises are on the north side of a certain creek called the Fishkill; and

Whereas: William Peartree made his will Jan. 27, 1713; and died; and his widow, Ann, made her will Nov. 16, 1730, and died; and

Whereas: On April 6, 1711, Roger Brett and Catharyna, his wife mortgaged to Thomas George of the City of New York for & 250 the same property; and

Whereas: Thomas George made his will Nov. 18, 1716, naming his wife, Lydia, and his children, his heirs; and

Whereas: On Dec. 18, 1729, Catharyna Brett mortgaged to Isaac De Peyster for &643.13.3 the same property; and

Whereas: On March 9, 1742, the executors of the will of William Peartree and the executors of the will of Thomas George assigned to Rev.

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Whereas: Ebenezer Pemberton the mortgages given to William Peartree and Thomas George; and
On June 10, 1742, Ebenezer Pemberton assigned both mortgages to Abraham De Peyster; and
Whereas: The amount of the monies now due on the two mortgages is more than the full value of the messuage, mill and 300 acres; and
Whereas: Catharyna Brett has agreed to release her equity; and
Whereas: Isaac De Peyster has agreed to release all his rights;
Now: In consideration as above, grantors to grantee
Witnesses: John Jones, Hannah Pine

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ENDNOTES

1. Recounted by Henry D. B. Bailey in *Local Tales and Sketches* (1874).

2. Author's note:

Robert stayed drunk for thirty years. He was a failure at everything he attempted, even a murder he once tried to commit in revenge for some wrong fancied by his fevered mind. On that occasion, he was found lying in ambush, waiting for his imagined enemy and he was sent home ignominiously. In his weakness, unrecognized then as the disease of alcoholism, he finally descended to work on the roads as a laborer, the only job he could hold.

One day, at the age of fifty-three, he fell to the ground in agony and prayed for relief. Suddenly, a stillness came upon him, and he went home, shaken, but quiet. His patient wife, seeing him at peace, began to speak to him gently of concern she was feeling – for some other drunkard. Her pity struck him so deeply that, as he would tell it, "It seemed as if my bowels would gush out of my body." He rushed out to the barn, fought his convulsions and won, becoming a sober, God-fearing citizen.

"How can anyone be the master of that which he is in fear?" he would ask. "No, I have not mastered it. My Jesus keeps it from me. He keeps that fear in my heart."

3. Dutch for pastor, minister

4. Author's note:

Unfortunately, de Lancey was not well. He suffered from asthma. Less than two months after Madam Brett's trip to Poughkeepsie, he went to dinner one summer evening on Staten Island. Coming home, he crossed the bay in an open boat and rode to his country seat, a mile out of town, on Bowery Road. Feeling uncomfortable, he sat up that night in his library chair. He was found dead the next morning, July 30, 1760, at the age of fifty-seven.

After his death, there was great doubt about his successor. This was a period of waiting for the old order to pass and the new to take its place in London. De Lancey's family importuned the Court to appoint his brother Oliver as governor, but even old King George II realized that Oliver was too much the aristocrat to succeed in the colony. The King died in October of that year, at the age of 77, never having made up his mind who should govern New York. His grandson, King George III, taking the throne at twenty-two, turned out to be too strong of mind. In the meantime, Dr. Cadwallader Colden, at seventy-three the oldest member of the Governor's Council in age and years of service, became acting governor by virtue of his seniority. He was an old friend of Madam Brett.

Colden, while highly esteemed, was not popular. Publicly, he was automatically and completely loyal to the Crown.

Privately an aloof Scotsman, son of a clergyman, and a doctor by profession, he was more interested in the sciences, botany and astronomy, than in the society of the first families of New York or the opinion of the people. He was in virtual retirement, studying and writing, when he was called back to take charge of the province.

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Colden governed intermittently until 1770, six years after the death of Madam Brett and six years before the Declaration of Independence. He retired to his country seat, still loyal to the Crown but quarreling with its representatives; respected but hardly loved by the more independent Americans.

John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, arrived in New York October 18, 1770, to relieve Colden. The eternal Colonial problem of money arose immediately. Dunmore, failing to reckon with the temper of a cantankerous Scot, tried to collect from Colden half the salary the lieutenant governor had been paid for the period from Dunmore's appointment as governor as "a capricious, ignorant Lord," refused to relinquish the cash. In less than a year, Dunmore was transferred to Virginia. The matter of Colden's money was dropped. William Tryon arrived July 8, 1771 to become the last royal governor recognized by the people of New York.

Colden died in 1776 at the age of eighty-eight.

5. Their reasons for leaving Holland were explained by William Bradford, the Pilgrims' first governor, in his book, *Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*. After eleven or twelve years in Holland, he wrote, they left "for sundry weighty and solid reasons." But the first, he said, was this:

They said and found by experience the hardness of the place and country to be such as few in comparison would come to them, and fewer that would bide it out and continue with them. For many that came to the, and many more that desired to be with them, could not endure that great labor and hard fare, with other inconveniences."

Finally, Bradford wrote, the Pilgrims decided to go to "the vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation."

6. One month after the first arrivals, three ships – *Orange Tree*, *Eagle* and *Love* – brought more Walloons to New Netherland, landing in June 1623. Some of them settled on Manhattan. Needing to find shelter as quickly and as easily as possible, they dug pits six or seven feet deep, lined the walls with timber and bark, covered the floors with planks and put on roofs of sod. These dug-outs served as their homes for several years. By 1626, there were 270 settlers in New Amsterdam, compared with 300 in Plymouth. In that year, a visitor to Manhattan, the Rev. Jonas Michaelius, wrote:

"They are therefore beginning to build new houses in place of the hovels and holes in which heretofore they huddled, rather than dwelt."

The first director general of New Netherland was the Walloon Pierre Minuit, a native of Wesel in the Duchy of Cleves, later the German province of Rhenish Prussia, near Liege'. Minuit left Wesel in 1624 after it fell under the Catholic influence of Spain. He entered the service of the West India Company and was appointed director general of its New Netherland colony in 1626 with the approval of the states-general of the United Netherlands.

Minuit arrived at New Amsterdam May 4, 1626, aboard the *Little Seagull* from Amsterdam, and for five years he ruled over the territory between the Connecticut and

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Delaware Rivers. He was best remembered for his purchase of Manhattan from the Canarsie tribe of Indians, who did not own the island. They lived across the East River in the woods of Long Island.

Minuit's service with the Dutch ended unhappily. There was no complaint about the bargain Minuit made for the purchase of Manhattan, but he incurred the displeasure of both the company and the settlers, whose conflicting interests made it impossible to manage the colony to the satisfaction of both and he was recalled in 1631.

National loyalties meant little in that time of changing empires. Minuit went to work for the Swedes, and established New Sweden at the mouth of the Delaware River -- a colony that was to compete briefly with, and finally be crushed by New Netherland. He died in a storm at sea in 1638 while on a trading expedition to the West Indies.

7. The Old Town Hall of Hasselt records the baptism on January 22, 1631, of Franc. (Francois) Rombout. His father's name was Joris Rombout and his mother's name was Johanna Hanen. His sponsors were Hannah de Coulile and Hendrick (no surname given), Judicial Secretary.

8. Francis Rombout always wrote his name as: Francois Rombouts, and was so referred to in written documents of the time.

9. Manuals of the Common Council of the Corporation of the City of New York, 1853.

10. Author's note:

Dutch families like this one in the early days of America were to become later victims of a historical and literary libel that portrayed them all as comic characters. The principal perpetrator of this fiction was Washington Irving, an Anglican and Presbyterian whose *Sketch Book* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* placed him in the front rank of American literature, the first American writer to win international recognition -- and the original caricaturist of the Dutch in Colonial times. The *Sketch Book*, particularly, published in 1819, made him famous and made the Dutch of a century earlier look ridiculous. He wrote of "a simple, good-natured fellow," Rip Van Winkle and "a thriving, contented, liberal-hearted farmer," Baltus Van Tassel, with his daughter, Katrina Van Tassel, "plump as a partridge, ripe and melting and rosy cheeked as one of her father's peaches," and her skinny suitor, Ichabod Crane, with a "soft and foolish heart." But Rip Van Winkle, the hen-pecked husband who slept for twenty years in the "fairy mountains" that Irving called the Kaatskill, and Ichabod Crane, the scarecrow school teacher, and Katrina Van Tassel, the girl he lost in the haunted dreamland of Sleepy Hollow, bore little resemblance to Francois Rombout, Roger Brett or Catharyna Rombout.

There were comic characters, easily caricatured, in the days when Dutch society was predominant in Manhattan. But, in general, the men were not bagg-panted buffoons and the women were not bovine maidens. As time passed and the Dutch made the transition to British rule, they developed a truly unique way of life -- solid, centuries-old Dutch culture, transplanted to a brash new world, placed under a benevolent foreign government and emerging triumphant as a peaceful, prosperous, happy society.

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11. On both the 1714 and 1717/18 census of Dutchess County he is listed as Pieter de Boyes (Hasbrouck, *History of Dutchess County*, 1909).

12. *The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1975.

13. Author's note:

More than 4,000 years earlier, man had already erected his largest single building, the Great Pyramid at Giza, Egypt. This monstrosity of more than two million blocks of stone, built by 100,000 men between 2590 and 1570 B.C., covered thirteen acres – all to provide a tomb for the King Cheops, or Pharaoh Khufu.

14. The house was taken down in 1987.

15. *Eighteenth Century Records of the Portion of Dutchess County, New York that was included in Rombout Precinct and the original Town of Fishkill*, collected by William Reese and edited by Helen Wilkinson Reynolds.

16 Editor's note:

On April 7, 1713, Roger Brett and Catharyna, his wife, gave to George Clarke, nephew of Governor Fletcher, a mortgage on the "southernmost part" of their lands for &700. The mortgage was canceled November 4, 1734. See deeds, Liber 2, page 10, office of State, Albany, New York.

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Historical Societies of Dutchess County

Amenia Historical Society
P.O. Box 22
Amenia, NY 12501

Beacon Historical Society
P. O. Box 89
Beacon, NY 12508

Beekman Historical Society
P.O.Box 165
Poughquag, NY 12570

**Bowdoin Park Historical
& Archaeological Association**
85 Sheafe Road
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

Clinton Historical Society
Clinton Corners, NY 12514

**The Town of Dover
Historical Society**
Dover Plains, NY 12533

**East Fishkill
Historical Society**
P. O. Box 245
Fishkill, NY 12524

Fishkill Historical Society
P. O. Box 133
Fishkill, NY 12524

Hyde Park Historical Society
P. O. Box 187
Hyde Park, NY 12538

LaGrange Historical Society
P. O. Box 412
LaGrangeville, NY 12540

**Little Nine Parnters
Historical Society**
P. O. Box 243
Pine Plains NY 12567

North East Historical Society
Millerton, NY 12546

**Historical Society of Quaker
Hill and Pawling, Inc.**
Box 99
Pawling, NY 12564

**Pleasant Valley
Historical Society**
Pleasant Valley, NY 12569

**Egbert Benson Historical
Society of Red Hook**
Box 1776
Red Hook, NY 12571

Rhinebeck Historical Society
P. O. Box 291
Rhinebeck, NY 12572

Stanford Historical Society
Stanfordville, NY 12581

Union Vale Historical Society
P. O. Box 100
Verbank, NY 12585

Wappingers Historical Society
P. O. Box 974
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

Washington Historical Society
Millbrook, NY 12545



