

**HALF MOON SERIES.
VOLUME I,
NUMBER V; GOVERNOR'S
ISLAND; PP.141-181**

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BLANCHE WILDER BELLAMY

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141

Half Moon Series

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VOLUME I. NUMBER V.

GOVERNOR'S ISLAND.

By BLANCHE WILDER BELLAMY.

GOVERNOR'S ISLAND makes its modest but official entry into the records of "Historic New York" on a Summer's day, the 16th of June, 1637.

The new little Fort at the Bowling Green, with its earthworks and bastions, has been recently completed by the Dutch West India Company, under its colors of orange, white, and blue, with the lettering "G. W. C.," *Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie*.

In the fort sits Wouter Van Twiller, second director sent by this "Privileged West India Company" to the Province of New Netherland. With him are Jacobus Corler, Andries Hudde, Jacus Boutyn, and Claes Van Elslant. All of them, under a variety of spellings, are men of note in the colony, and all sign themselves as members of the Director's Council.

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The
Purchase
1637

142	Governor's Island
The Purchase 1637	<p>Two Indians, Cakapeteijno and Pehiwas, are also present. They have appeared and presented themselves and declared that, voluntarily and deliberately, and with the approbation of the community, for and in consideration of certain parcels of goods which they acknowledge to their full and grateful satisfaction to have received, they do "transport, cede, give over and convey to Wouter Van Twiller, Director General of New Netherland, the Nooten Island, in the Indian tongue called Pagganck, situate over against the Island Manahatas between the North and East Rivers of New Netherland."</p> <p>In a word, to dispense further with the formalities of the Roman-Dutch law, Van Twiller has bought the Island, now known as Governor's Island, from the Indians. He gives them in exchange an axe-head or two, a string of beads, a few nails. We cannot fix exactly the contents or value of these "certain parcels of goods," yet the bargain we may be sure is a shrewd one and notable, too, for one cause other than its shrewdness. No record has been found of any other sale of Pagganck, Nooten, Governor's Island, in the subsequent two hundred and sixty years of its history. Granted, captured, granted, leased, ceded, it has but once been made the subject of so plebeian a matter as exchange and barter.</p>

Governor's Island

143

When the Director cast his acquisitive eye on Nooten or Nutten or Noten or Nut Island, it lay close beside and was almost a part of Long Island. Marabie Bevoise testified in court a century later that she "heard Jeromus Remsen's mother say that there was only a small creek between Nutten Island and the shoar, and that a squah carried her sister over it in a tub"; and Jeromus Remsen added that he had "heard his mother say . . . that it was all Sedge and Meadow, only a Creek between Nutten and Long Island."

This Creek, now Buttermilk Channel, a deep arm of the sea thrown around the island, was at low tide a shallow ford. The little Huguenot who was first ferried over it in a wash-tub was Sara, the daughter of Katalyntie Trico and Joris Jansen de Rapalye, "the first born Christian daughter in New Netherland." She was not the first European visitor to the island. The proud boast is even made that it was the first place of settlement in the harbor. This rests on a precarious support, an equivocal entry in the journal of the Labadist travelers, Dankers and Sluyter in 1679: "In its (the river's) mouth, before the city and between the city and Red Hoeck on Long Island lies Noten Island opposite the fort, *the first place the Hollanders ever occupied in this bay!*"

It is certain that the cattle of the settlers who came in 1625, bringing horses, cows,

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Record
Endorsed
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Ulbat
Witnesses
Say

The
first
Building
1638

sheep, and hogs, were landed on Nutten Island, and remained there a day or two, but "there being no means of pasturing them there they were shipped in sloops and boats to the Manhates, right opposite said Island."

Having escaped these intruders, the Island was left to its owners, the Indians, "who sometimes manifested themselves with arrows," in undisturbed verdure and beauty until Van Twiller possessed himself of it, and began to put up the first building. This we learn from the fact that when his greedy rule ended in 1638, and an inventory of his property was made, he had "On Nooten Island the frame of a house and 21 pairs of goats." A saw-mill was also built at the Company's expense. In 1639 it was leased by "the Honorable, wise and right Prudent Mr. William Kieft" to Evert Bischoep, Sibout Claesen, and Harman Bastiansen, who "acknowledged to have amiably agreed and covenanted for the hire of it." They were to pay five hundred merchantable or sound planks yearly, one half pine and the other half oak; to keep the mill in repair; to deliver it in as good order as they received it, and "to saw not less than 65 to the bulk." They also undoubtedly supplied to the thrifty Dutch housewives those excellent hickory logs which they soon learned to appreciate "both for fire on their hearths and coals for their footstoves, because they

Governor's Island

145

last longer than others and are not buried in ashes."

After Van Twiller, "full of curses and of Council dinners," had departed from office, his so-called purchases were claimed by the Government. The fact that he, the Governor, was the first and only private owner of the Island, however, still links his memory to it, though it does not owe its present name directly to him. During the Dutch period, and generally throughout the English Colonial period, it was called Nutten Island, from the groves of nut trees, hickory and chestnut, which covered it.

But in 1698 it was set aside by the Assembly as being "part of the Denizen of his Majesty's Fort at New York, for the benefit and accommodation of his Majesty's Governours and Commanders-in-Chief for the time being," and thence came to be familiarly called "The Governor's Island."

Another link with the memory of Van Twiller is the fact that when he came over in *De Zoutberg* in 1633 he brought with him one hundred and four soldiers, the first military force sent to the province. He was therefore its first official military head, a fact which properly associates his memory with the "Forteresse" now occupying his peaceful plantation. This "plantation," on which, by the way, Van Twiller did not, himself, plant,

Act of the
Feb Year
of
William

Bill for
Breaking
Extrava-
gant
Grants of
Land
1699

became in time a pleasant "Withdrawing place" for the Governors, but it proved a snare to one at least of the Royal Colonials who were its temporary possessors, and whose residence in the fort at the Battery was "only a gun-shotte away."

These Governors were, many of them, no less greedy and grasping than their Dutch forerunner, Van Twiller. In 1638 he was chastened for having taken to himself, among other trifles, Nooten Island, Red Hook, the two Islands at Hellegat, and for "Stretching out a hand toward two fflats on Long Island."

But in 1699 Lord Bellomont, then Governor of the Province, received instructions from the Lords Chief Justices of England whereby he was directed "to use all legall meanes for the breaking of Extravagant grants of Lands." The Council decreed that Mr. Attorney General should prepare a decree vacating the aforesaid grants, and his Excellency moved "That there bee a clause inserted in the Body of the Bill to prevent the Governor or Commander-in-Cheif of this Province for the time being from alienating Nutten Island, the King's Farm, the King's Garden, and the Swamp and Ffresh water as being the Demesne belonging to the Kings Governour for the time being."

The fact was that Bellomont's predecessor, Colonel Fletcher, had been rapidly disposing of all the lands within reach (on a strictly pay-

Governor's Island	147
<p>ing basis, of course), "Making immense grants in parcels of upwards of a hundred thousand acres to one man." He offered a peculiar outrage to his successor by proposing to lease Nutten Island, "Where the Governor kept a parcel of sheepe," to a footman!</p> <p>The later Governors did in fact lease the Island for their own profit. We have a pious petition from Richard Deane to Lord Dunmore in 1770 begging for a continuance of his lease.</p> <p>"The petition of Richard Deane," he says, "Most humbly Sheweth</p> <p>"That Your Lordship's Petitioner having Rented an Island call'd the Governor's Island from his Honour the Lieu^t Governor For the space of two years from the First of March last which Island is now your Lordship's.</p> <p>"Your Lordship's Petitioner has been at a great expence cultivating said Island which he knew he must lose very considerably by ; and which would greatly distress him and his large family, if it was not continued to him the time he agreed for, and as it allways has been customary when the Island has been lett and a change in Government to happen the Tenant in being to be continued at least for the time he had taken it ; And it was on expectation of the same kindness that your Lordship's Petitioner was induced to go to that Expence, therefore</p> <p>"Your Lordship's Petitioner Most Humbly submits his hopes to your Lordship's great goodness, not doubting to find that tender Benevolence for which your Lordship is so justly esteem'd ; and obtain your Lordship's Permission to continue and proceed on in his business as the season is so far advanced, which will the better enable him to pay your Lordship's Rent.</p> <p>"That your Lordship's petitioner has been led by the</p>	<p>Petition of Deane in 1770</p>