

**HISTORY OF THE CITY
AND COUNTY OF
SCHENECTADY, N.Y.**

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History of the city and county of Schenectady, N.Y. by Schenectady County teachers' association

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SCHENECTADY COUNTY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

**HISTORY OF THE CITY
AND COUNTY OF
SCHENECTADY, N.Y.**

HISTORY
—OF—
The City and County of
Schenectady, N. Y.

2nd ed. revised to date, 1913

ORIGINALLY PREPARED IN 1887 FOR USE IN
THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE CITY,
NOW REVISED AND BROUGHT
DOWN TO DATE

SCHENECTADY, N. Y.
1913

History of the City and County of Schenectady

CHAPTER I.

Geography and Early History.

SCHENECTADY County was formed from Albany County, March 7, 1809. It is bounded by the following adjacent counties: on the north, by Montgomery and Saratoga; on the east, by Saratoga and Albany; on the south, by Albany and Schoharie; on the west, by Schoharie and Montgomery. In shape it is very irregular. A line across the county, in its widest part, would be drawn from the south-east corner of Niskayuna to a point on the Schoharie Creek, near the south-west corner of Duanesburgh and would be about 28 miles long. The Mohawk River flows in a general south-easterly direction through the county and forms a part of its north-eastern border. Besides this river, the principal streams are Schoharie Creek, Norman's Kill, and their tributaries. The city of Schenectady and the towns of Niskayuna, Rotterdam, Prince-

town, and Duaneburgh are on the south side of the river, and Glenville is on the north side.

The surface of the northern and western parts of the county is much broken by hills and valleys. Towereuna hill, in the extreme south-western corner of Glenville, rises abruptly from the river and is, perhaps, 300 feet in height. Other high hills are in the north-western part of Rotterdam, along the river, and are of about the same height. The highest land in the county is in the neighborhood of Mariaville, and is about 1,000 feet above the water in the Mohawk. The south-east part of the county is mostly level and sandy. The bottomlands along the river are widest a short distance west of the city limits, where they are about three miles wide, varying thence westward from a few rods to a mile in width. The underlying rock through the county is, generally, Hudson shales, while in some places birdseye limestone is found. The greater part of the surface is covered with a thick deposit of drift, consisting principally of clay in the west part, and sand in the east. The principal agricultural products of the county are hay, oats, rye, corn, and potatoes. Broom-corn was for many years very extensively cultivated, but of recent years it has declined in importance, owing to western competition. The exact location of the Union College dome, in the city of Schenectady, is in north

latitude 42°, and west longitude (from Greenwich) 73°. The name Schenectady is derived from Schau-naugh-ta-da, which in the language of the Iroquois signifies "over the pine plains," or "across the pine plains," and is said to have been used by them at first to designate Fort Orange (now Albany). The Dutch afterward applied it to the place where Schenectady now stands, as being over the plains from Albany. By the census of 1912, the population of Schenectady city was 80,000.

The earliest European settlers of Schenectady County came from the Netherlands. They were descended from a noble race, their ancestors, even as far back as to the times of the Romans, having been distinguished for their brave spirit and love of liberty. During a large part of the middle ages, the Netherlands were divided into a number of feudal principalities, whose chieftains held a nominal allegiance to the German emperors or the kings of France. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Netherlands, then comprising what is now Holland and Belgium, had between two and three hundred walled cities, numerous towns and villages, and a population of three millions. The great cities grew in wealth and power, chiefly by manufactures and commerce. Having acquired chartered rights, they became in reality city republics, regulating their own local affairs, choosing their own magis-

trates, and sending their representatives to the general assembly of the provinces.

When their rights were invaded by the Emperor Charles V. and his successors on the throne of Spain, they made a brave resistance, and in 1579 the northern portion of the country united in a permanent confederation, known as "The Seven United Provinces of the Netherlands." Thus was laid the foundation of the Dutch Republic. The heroic struggle for civil and religious liberty was continued by the Netherlanders for thirty years longer, until it resulted in the acknowledgment of their independence in 1609.

In that memorable year, Henry Hudson, an English navigator, then in the service of the Dutch East India Company, discovered the river that is now called by his name. Sailing up this river for about 150 miles, he took possession of the country in the name of the States-General of Holland. To the territory which they had thus acquired the Dutch gave the name of New Netherlands. In 1613 they erected a few buildings on Manhattan Island, where New York city now stands. In 1614 they built a fort and storehouse on a little island just below Albany, and in 1623 they built Fort Orange on the site where the city of Albany now stands.

The early history of Schenectady County is interwoven with that of the native Indians found in this

part of North America. These belonged to two great families, the Algonquin and the Iroquois. The latter were distinguished for their intelligence and warlike spirit. They formed a confederation of five tribes, the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas, to which was added later, in 1714, the tribe of the Tuscaroras. In the contests waged by rival European nations for the possession of this country, the Iroquois were hostile to the French, and friendly to the Dutch and the English. In 1618, they made with the Dutch a treaty of peace, which was long and faithfully observed on both sides. The Dutch, always intent upon traffic, secured the rich fur trade. In exchange for furs the Indians received European trinkets, fire-water and fire-arms.

Among the confederated Indian tribes, the Mohawks were the most powerful. Along the banks of the Mohawk River they had five fortified posts, called castles, one of them at the mouth of the river, another at Schenectady, and others farther west. They claimed ownership in the soil extending still more widely, northward to Canada, eastward to the Hudson, and southward to the Catskills.

In 1621 the Dutch West India Company was chartered by the States-General of Holland, and invested with almost absolute authority over the New Netherlands. At first, as their only object was

trade, they made no effort to acquire possession of land, but afterward they concluded to attempt a more permanent occupation. For the purpose of encouraging colonization, the company gave to any of its members who would buy land from the Indians and form a colony of fifty persons nearly absolute control of such land and the colonists. These owners were called patroons, and they acquired very extensive landed property. One of them, Killian Van Rensselaer, owned a tract of land containing over 700,000 acres, including all of the present county of Albany and the greater part of the counties of Rensselaer and Columbia. This large estate was named Rensselaerwyck, and the name of Beaverwyck was applied to the district, or hamlet, which included Fort Orange. Van Rensselaer did not himself come over to this country, but intrusted the care of his colony to Arendt Van Curler (or Corlaer), who came to this country in 1630, and under whose able management the colony was greatly prospered.

As Arendt Van Curler subsequently became the founder of Schenectady and left upon the men and institutions of his day the permanent impress of his character, it is proper here to describe his character and deeds. We find in him a most worthy illustration of the sterling traits inherited from a noble ancestry. To a mind of great natural strength and