

**JACOB LEISLER; A
PLAY OF
OLD NEW YORK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649158416

Jacob Leisler; a play of old New York by William O. Bates

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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*With an Introductory Note by
Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer*



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
MCMXIII

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THE SOCIETY OF COLONIAL WARS
FOUNDED TO PERPETUATE
THE MEMORY OF
THE FORBEARS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM AND UNITY
IS DEDICATED THIS TRIBUTE
TO THE MOST PICTURESQUE AND TRAGIC FIGURE
IN ALL ITS LIST OF ANCESTORS

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INTRODUCTION

BY MRS. SCHUYLER VAN RENSSELAER

WHEN the story upon which an historical drama has been based is not familiar, the reader or hearer must wish to learn in how far it has been truthfully presented, in how far it has been altered by the dramatist. Of course, the interest and the value of the play depend, primarily, not upon its historical but upon its dramatic qualities; and as it is impossible, if only by reason of the immense complexity of real life, that any past happenings should without alteration fit perfectly into any dramatic scheme, the dramatist may omit much that history records and may also change incidents and modify characters. But changes too numerous or too radical outrage that respect for facts, that reverence for historical verity, which persists no matter how willing we are to judge a play as a play. The true story, we feel, should not be contradicted in essentials; its spirit should not be travestied; its characters may be modified, but should not be metamorphosed.

The story of Jacob Leisler is not well known even in the city where it unrolled itself more than two hundred years ago. For long it was almost forgotten except by a few historians and antiquaries. Only in recent years has it been told in detail in print. Now it is being gradually recalled to mind, largely through the efforts of the City History Club of New York to spread, especially among our school children, a knowledge of our local history in all its phases. Yet to most of Mr. Bates's readers, I fear, his subject-matter will be entirely new. They will be quite unable to compare his drama with the facts upon which he based it.

Therefore he has asked me to aid them in doing so. But I need not write at much length or refer to many details, for the agreement between his facts and his drama is remarkably close. The records of the period which have been preserved are brief and in some parts fragmentary. This means that the need for selection, for omission, was less than is often the case with historical material. On the other hand, the tale as history tells it is so dramatic, and most of those who figure in it, even when we know little about them, are so sharply characterized and contrasted, that the need for invention or for conspicuous modification was also small.

No character in the drama has been invented ex-