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JAMES BROWNLEE, D. D.

By ANNELIESE HARLING

We are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Chas. E. Simonson of The Country Club Grounds for their donation of the oil painting, which has long been in their family, of the Rev. James Brownlee, D.D. (1808-1895), pastor of the Reformed (Dutch) Church at Port Richmond, Staten Island, N. Y. We have not yet been able to determine the identity of the artist, since the portrait is unsigned. The painting measures 28½ x 22 inches and is in the "American Primitive" style and shows Rev. Brownlee as a young man evidently shortly after he became a minister about 1835.

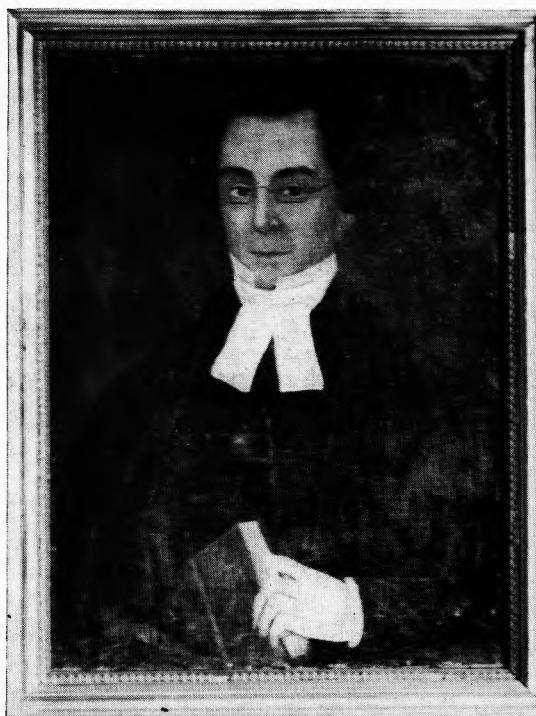
With this very welcome addition to our collection of items recalling the early life on Staten Island, we should like to devote a section of this issue of the "Historian" to dwell particularly on the importance of the life and work of the Rev. James Brownlee on Staten Island during the latter half of the 19th century.

Many pertinent facts can be gathered from the source of the Discourse "In Memoriam," delivered by the Rev. H. Demarest on Sunday morning, March 10, 1895, at the Church in Port Richmond a copy of which is in the Library of the Society. This Discourse clearly attests to the fact that the Rev. Brownlee was well-known and loved, both for his learned sermons and his frequent personal visits in the homes of his parishioners.

James Brownlee was born on April 12, 1808 in the Manse of the Presbyterian congregation at Fulkirk, Scotland, of which church his father (also called James) was pastor. It is known that his father was a very able minister of the New Testament, and, by the fine example of his life, a great influence in moulding the later life of his eldest son. Young James' intention to enter the ministry also was first seriously awakened on that Sabbath when he ascended the pulpit to aid his father who had suddenly taken ill, and who died soon after on May 22, 1821, while yet in his prime.

Young James Brownlee took his degree in the University of Glasgow, at the age of 18; then spent some time in further education in France and in Scotland as a home missionary in the Hebrides. He then came to America where his mother, brothers and sister had come after the death of their father. Partly through the influence of his uncle, Dr. Wm. C. Brownlee, he was called to the pastorate of the Reformed Dutch Church of S. I. at Port Richmond, and both his ordination and installation took place on Sunday, Aug. 23, 1835. The Reformed Church was, of course, Dr. Brownlee's adopted church. Upon first becoming acquainted with it upon arrival in America, he is known to have said: "We are very much like the Presbyterians, but the points of difference, I think, are to our

(Continued on Page 12, Column 1)



The Rev. James Brownlee, D.D.

Collections of The Staten Island Historical Society

THE HISTORY OF A LEGEND

By ROSWELL S. COLES

The origin, development and analysis of the story of Captain Christopher Billopp and the circumnavigation of Staten Island in 1668.

The legend of Captain Christopher Billopp and his circumnavigation of Staten Island in 1668 with its consequent annexation to New York has been told and continues to be told as fact so often that at the present time it is almost impossible to keep it in its proper historical perspective. It is the best known story about Staten Island, and of all our legends it is probably the most widely accepted as true.¹

I have called the story a "legend." A legend is defined by Webster's New International Dictionary as, "Any story coming down from the past, especially one taken as historical though not verifiable by historical records." This definition fits the Billopp story; it has come down from the past, it has been taken (and still is taken) as historical and it is, at this writing at least, not verifiable by any historical records.

We have ample evidence in our literature to show fairly completely its history, including its birth, its development from a "good story" in "tradition," and "legend" and (if we speak uncritically) "history." In addition we have also had a persistent and often unpopular exposition of the place the story should occupy in bona fide history. The only question in my mind about the classification as a legend is that it has come down to us from a past which is not very distant and from sources known otherwise to be unreliable.

This article developed as I was studying the documents relating to the boundary dispute between New York and New Jersey which began about 1668 and continued until at least 1833. The circumnavigation story keeps cropping up in

¹ The last account which has come to me in my search for material was at a meeting of the Rotary Club of Staten Island on August 5, 1947 and in this verbal account contained, strangely enough a new variation — Billopp rowed rather than sailed around the Island.

this material, sometimes as a good story and sometimes as proof of ownership. But nowhere in our literature has anyone brought together and examined these various accounts and criticisms and it seems worthwhile now to do this so that they may be available for further studies of Staten Island history.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEGEND

The first written evidence we have of the Billopp story appears to be an account by J. Barnitz Bacon in the *New York Evening Post* of October 15, 1873. This is quoted in Mr. Davis' *Conference House*. Mr. Davis had a scrap book with this original account which is now in the *Institute* library.

"The tradition in relation to Billopp is thus related by Judge Disosway, the local chronicler of the Island: 'Geographically, Staten Island is almost a part of New Jersey. To settle the question as to which province it should belong, the Duke of York decided that all islands in the Bay of New York around which a ship could sail in twenty-four hours should belong to New York. In those days it was somewhat doubtful whether Staten Island could be thus engirdled. There was a spirited contest on the question. Captain Billopp, in the 'Bentley,' achieved the feat and secured the Island for his royal patron, leaving it to remain a part of his province of New York.'"

We do not know for certain from what sources Bacon quoted Disosway. It seems most probable that the account was from one of a series of articles on Staten Island which Disosway wrote for *The Richmond County Gazette* (Leng & Davis, vol. II, page 808) or *The Staten Island Union*. No complete files of the *Gazette* or the *Union* have been found and the articles preserved in the known files do not include the circumnavigation story. Unless complete files subsequently are discovered and the story appears in one of the Disosway articles therein it seems probable that the original account of the Billopp legend has been lost to history. If the origin has been lost it is evident that the Billopp story has achieved, by 1948, one prime component of a legend, a beclouded origin.

The next account is by the historian, Benson Lossing, and it appears in *Appleton's Journal*, Vol. XI, No. 255, February 7, 1874. Lossing is later referred to by Charles Farmar Billopp. In this account, similar to that of Bacon in many respects, the date 1668 has not yet become attached to the legend. It is also clearly history and tradition "so mixed." One unique statement is that up to that time no ship had passed through the Kills and there was a spirited dispute as to this possibility. This version does not later appear. The "Bentley" is a warship.

"History and tradition are so mixed concerning the name of the manor

and the Billopp family, that it is difficult to discover the pure truth. One story tells us that Captain Christopher Billopp of the British navy, in command of the war-ship Bentley, was stationed at New York soon after New Netherlands passed into the permanent possession of the Duke of York by royal grant and military conquest. At about that time a question arose as to which province, New York or New Jersey, Staten Island—the Mat-a-nu-ke of the Indians—belonged. It had been decided that all islands in and adjacent to New York Bay, around which a ship could sail in twenty-four hours, should belong to the province of New York. A passage of a ship through the Kills had not then been attempted, and there was ground for dispute as to the possession of Staten Island. The war of words was spirited. One party declared that a ship could *not* pass through, while the other party as vehemently declared that it *could*. Captain Billopp settled the controversy in favor of New York by passing through the Kills with his ship Bentley, and circumnavigating the island in twenty-four hours. Therefore, in 1683 it was officially declared to be one of the political divisions of the province of New York, under the title of Richmond County. The grateful duke rewarded Captain Billopp for his eminent services by granting him several hundred acres of the southern side of the island, which were constituted a manor bearing the name of the good ship Bentley, which had won the prize.

Another story tells us that Captain Billopp was so rewarded because of his gallant service in a naval action in which the Duke of York was commander, but says nothing about the "manor."

With the publication of the *Annals of Staten Island from its Discovery to the Present Time*, by J. J. Clute in 1877,² the story appeared first in what Staten Islanders, and others, would take for "true" history. But Clute, in his chapter title, (chapter VIII, page 47.) speaks of "Tradition and legitimate history" and says in his opening paragraph, "—we shall be under the necessity of mingling in some measure, tradition with legitimate history, and of correcting some errors into which some of the prominent historians of the state have fallen." (Unfortunately this last refers not to Disosway but to the historian Dunlap's account of the Billopp genealogy and is of no help in our study.)

From the context it would seem that Clute at the time he was writing looked upon the Billopp story as neither "tradition" nor "history," but just a "good story," indicating the lack of historical evidence by such qualifying statements as "it is said" and "it is also said." But

⁽²⁾ Biographical note: Leng & Davis, Vol. II, pages 824, 834.

the date "1668" now appears connected with the Billopp story and since it is the date when Staten Island was adjudged to belong to New York it appears to account for the later references to 1668. Billopp "owns" the "Bentley."

"In 1668 the Island was 'adjudged to belong to New York,' because one of the outlets of Hudson's River ran around the Island; while Berkeley and Carteret, by the terms of their patent, were bounded by the river and the bay. The Dutch always appear to have regarded the inner bay or harbor as a mere expansion of the River and the Narrows as its mouth. In their documents, Staten Island is frequently described as lying in the river. If this view was correct, the island evidently belonged to New Jersey, because it was embraced within its limits. The Duke of York himself appears to have had his doubts about the matter, for it is said that when this question of jurisdiction was first agitated, he decided that all islands lying in the river, or harbor, which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should remain in his jurisdiction, otherwise to New Jersey.

"Christopher Billopp being then in the harbor in command of a small ship called the Bentley, which it is also said he owned, undertook the task of sailing around the Island, and accomplished it within twenty-four hours, thus securing it to the Duke, who in gratitude for the service rendered him, bestowed upon Billopp a tract of 1163 acres of land in the extreme southern part of the Island which was called the Manor of Bentley, after the ship which had accomplished the task."

The Clute account appears, nearly verbatim, in the *Richmond County Standard* as part of the "Story of the Old Billopp House," which, according to Mr. Davis's notes "probably appeared in 1882." There is a page of interesting illustrations by the well known Staten Island artist Fred W. Kost including what appears to be an old stone dated 1668.

We next come to two popularized accounts of the legend, the first in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1878, Vol. LXII, No. 340, page 545) entitled "A Spring Jaunt on Staten Island," by W. H. Rideing. This is interesting because Lord John Berkeley and Sir George Carteret, the two original New Jersey proprietors, have been united in one flesh, so to speak, as "Berkeley Carteret."

"When the Duke of York had conveyed New Jersey to Berkeley Carteret a question was raised as to whether Staten Island was included in the grant, and to settle the matter it was decided that all islands lying in the bay or harbor should belong to New York if they could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours. Christopher Billopp, who owned a small ship called the Bentley, sailed around Staten Is-

land in that time, and the Duke gave him the tract of land, on part of which the house is built, in reward for his services. Another story states that Billopp was rewarded by the land for gallant service in a naval action."

Hon. Erastus Brooks carried on the legend in, "Historical Records of Staten Island, Centennial and BiCentennial, for Two Hundred Years or more, Delivered at Staten Island, November 1st, 1883." The notable variation contained herein is the uniting of Capt. Christopher Billopp of 1668 with Col. Christopher Billopp of 1776 (page 25).

"Billopp's house, where he met the American Commissioners, was not only Lord Howe's headquarters but the owner thereof was a devotee of the Duke of York. He had sailed around Staten Island to prove that the Island belonged to New York, the Duke having decided that all islands lying in or near the harbor which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours belonged to his New York jurisdiction otherwise to New Jersey."

We now come to the second volume of what is usually thought of as Staten Island "history." In 1887, ten years after Clute's history, Richard M. Bayles³ brought out the *History of Richmond County (Staten Island), New York From Its Discovery To The Present Time*. Bayles does Clute the honor of copying verbatim his account of Billopp, with the interesting exception of the use of "Hudson River" for "Hudson's River" which Clute, as we shall see, had apparently taken from Brodhead or the original grant to Berkeley and Carteret. It is unnecessary to quote Bayles as there is nothing added by him.

A year later, a guide book, "Staten Island" by Gustav Kobbe gives the date of the capture of New Amsterdam by the British as 1661 instead of 1664 and also states that the conveyance to Berkeley and Carteret was made after the capture of New Amsterdam by the British rather than before. Otherwise the story follows the regular pattern.

About 1890 an abortive effort to preserve the Billopp House took place. On December 13 of that year Ira K. Morris,⁴ chairman of the Billopp House Committee reported in the *Proceedings of the Natural Science Association of Staten Island* (Vol. II, page 65). This report is of interest historically as Morris was later to become the author of the third "history" of Staten Island, in which the Billopp story receives its greatest enlargement. The report follows in part:

"As we cross the threshold of this ancient structure, our minds wander back through the dim avenues of history, and we recall so much that has aided not only to form early records of our country, but to lay the very foundation of the nation . . . we see

the Duke of York, long before he drew near to the fulfilment of his cherished day dream of ascending the throne of England as King James the Second, deciding the fate of Staten Island; and this old house stands here today as a monument of that event. Up to the year 1668 it was a disputed question whether Staten Island belonged to New York or New Jersey, and, tired of the annoyance that this fact gave, the Duke decided that all islands lying in the harbor of New York which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should remain in his jurisdiction, otherwise to belong to New Jersey.

"Captain Christopher Billopp, the commander of the little vessel of which we have spoken, undertook the task and was successful. In consideration of this service, the Duke presented Captain Billopp with a tract of land containing 1,163 acres. There and then he built this old house, and named it "the Manor of Bentley," in honor of the vessel which had performed the great task."

There are also accounts in the *New York Tribune*, Sept. 30, 1895 and *New York Journal*, March 23, 1896.

Morris' *Memorial History of Staten Island, New York* appeared in 1898. In this account we note that the Duke is quoted directly, that "tradition" is accredited with the "better part of an hour to spare," and the original version of the barrel story. The discussion of the "historians" about the status of the "Bentley" is also new. The account appears in Vol. I, page 85.

"During all the years of Dutch colonial government 'Staten Island' was adjudged to belong to Novae Caesarea, or New Jersey."

He goes on to tell of the difficulties between the Dutch, French and English, under English rule and adds on page 88:

"These troubles continued until 1668, increasing with each year. Several animated sessions were held by the Council but to no effect. Finally the Duke took the matter into his own hands that 'all islands lying in the harbor of New York, which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should belong to the colony of New York, otherwise it should belong to New Jersey.'

"Captain Christopher Billopp, the commander of a little vessel belonging to the British Navy, was in the port of Perth Amboy. He performed the task in accordance with the Duke's proclamation and, according to tradition, had the better part of an hour to spare. It is said that he covered the deck of his vessel with empty barrels, thus gaining considerable sailing power. In consideration of this service, the Duke presented Captain Billopp

with a tract of land containing eleven hundred and sixty-three acres."

The footnote on the "Bentley" states:

"Some historians claim that the vessel known as the "Bentley," which Captain Billopp commanded, was in the merchant service. Others insist that it was neither a naval nor merchant vessel, but was simply a pleasure yacht. It is claimed by the latter that it belonged to Captain Billopp personally, as he kept it for private use while he remained a resident of Staten Island. It was fitted up, however, with the appliances of war, which, in those days of piracy was a necessity to insure safety on the high seas."

Morris later adds additional material in Chapter XVI, page 136. The "Bentley" now carries two cannon and is an ocean going vessel.

"In the spring of 1667, Christopher Billopp sailed from England in the "Bentley," a small vessel carrying two cannons on her deck. She reached the banks of Newfoundland after several weeks of tossing about the ocean, and almost immediately started to make a cruise along the coast of New Netherlands. It is not definitely known whether he was in the service of Charles II, or whether the venture was of a private nature . . .

"After the Duke of York had conveyed the territory of New Jersey to Carter and Berkeley, a doubt arose whether Staten Island was not included in the grant, by the terms of the charter. Carteret, the Governor, not the proprietor, did not lay claim to the Island, in a certain way he admitted that it did not belong to his jurisdiction, and accepted a conveyance for a tract of land on the Island from Nichols, the Duke of York's agent. In 1668, however, the Island 'was adjudged to belong to New York,' and the old stone house on the beautiful slope overlooking the Raritan Bay, still stands to remind the present generation of that important period." (Here Morris repeats nearly verbatim his account in the *Proceedings* mentioned above.)

In 1906 Borough President George Cromwell asked the then Staten Island Association of Arts and Sciences to appoint a committee to confer on important local events to be placed on the historical tablets in the new Borough Hall. A committee of Ira K. Morris, William T. Davis and Dr. Arthur Hollick were appointed (*Proceedings*, Staten Island page 56.) In November (page 83) of that year Morris, for the committee, submitted a report which later aroused much controversy. Among the other items occurred, "1668—Staten Island separated from New Jersey." More will be said of this report.

(Continued on Page 14, Column 2)

(3-4) Biographical note—Legg & Davis, Vol. II, page 825.

Rev. James Brownlee*(Continued from Page 9, Column 2)*

(the Dutch Reformed Church) advantage". Dr. Brownlee rejoiced, especially in his later years, in every evidence of Christian unity, but even so, he was strongly attached to that portion of the Church Universal in which Providence had cast his lot.

When young Dr. Brownlee accepted the duties of his new post, his church was in a by no means flourishing condition, spiritually or financially, and the congregation of less than 100 members was divided between the two churches: one in the town of Richmond, and the other in Port Richmond, where the Rev. Brownlee was called to preside. With the years, however, the patient efforts of the new Pastor bore fruit and conditions improved visibly; the congregation grew, a new edifice was erected—all testimony to the ability of Dr. Brownlee.

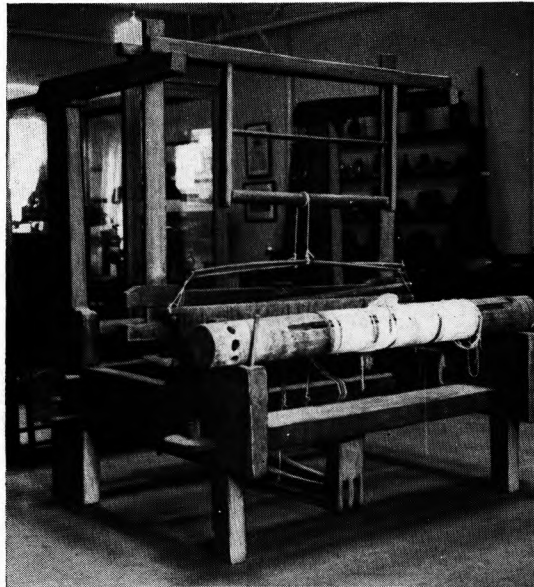
It is also remarkable to note that even during the last years of Dr. Brownlee's office, his Church maintained its high standing in the community. Despite his diminishing physical vigor and mental capacity, which inevitably accompany old age, the numbers of Dr. Brownlee's flock did not fall off, as they are so frequently wont to do. The zeal of this parish did not falter. On May 1, 1890, Dr. Brownlee retired from active services and was declared "Pastor Emeritus" by the Classis of New York; but while he was, as such, released from all pastoral duties, he did not become wholly inactive. He continued to deliver the sermon at Communion Season, with very few exceptions, and otherwise maintained, to the very end, a loving interest in the affairs of the Reformed Church.

Dr. Brownlee was a very scholarly man; his early education and his habits of study were maintained throughout his life. His knowledge and interests covered a wide field. Thoroughly versed in the systems of theology, he was also proficient in subjects such as mathematics and was an unusually good practical mechanic. He rendered most excellent service while he filled, for several terms, the office of Commissioner of Schools on Staten Island.

We do not have the record of Dr. Brownlee's marriage to Henrietta Crocherson, a member of an old Staten Island family, however we can assume from other facts that it must have been in either 1840 or 1841. They had five children one of whom, Catherine Brownlee Horton, was well known for her work as corresponding secretary of the Women's Executive Committee of the Board of Domestic Missions, Reformed Church in America. Mrs. Brownlee died April 21, 1858. Dr. Brownlee died at Cranford, N. J. February 21, 1895 in his 87th year.

Dr. Brownlee is remembered as a devoted pastor and faithful friend, accounting for his long service and the winning

of the respect of his Staten Island parishioners throughout his lifetime. In his later years, he is often known to have said: "I am too old to form new ties; my friends are on Staten Island." It is indeed fitting, therefore, that present-day members of the Dutch Reformed Church on Staten Island, as well as members of other churches as well, be proud of their forebear, the Rev. James Brownlee—faithful minister of Christ and outstanding figure in the history and development of our Island.

*Photo by R. C. Fingado***The Sanders Loom**

Recently the collections of the Society were enriched by a gift by Mrs. Walter D. Sanders of an early loom, here illustrated. While the history of weaving has been often and well written, the history of the development of the loom itself has been comparatively neglected and yet would be a fascinating subject.

As with the tools of any trade, the loom while its purpose remained the same universally, its construction varied greatly with the country of its use. For example, German and Dutch looms were formed of massive wooden members of an open cantilever type of construction while the English loom was a closed frame type of construction only and of a lighter wooden frame.

The Sanders loom, as can be seen in the illustration, is of the Dutch type, which is to be expected since it came from a small town on the Rondout Creek south of Kingston, a section early settled by the Dutch. The loom is a 17th Century type and earlier, characterized by heavy oak construction with some attempt at ornamentation in the cutting of the lower horizontal members. A nearly identical loom of German origin, dated 1785, is in the Cloister, Ephrata, Pennsylvania.

The loom is unusually complete for one so early; the parts are all present, the cloth and warp beams, the beater and reeds of the early cane type, the heddle frames with linen threads for eyes, and the treadles.

Mrs. Sanders had used the loom for simple weaving before making her gift to the Society, but it is very likely that this was the only weaving done in many years since hand weaving for cloth fabrics ceased with the abandonment of the linen or small spinning wheel in this section before 1840 to 1850.

The loom has been set up in the Museum under the direction of Mrs. Sanders and Mr. Philip Brown, who has had a long interest in the handicrafts and was also responsible for the careful transporting of it to the Museum.

—L. M.

**THE BRITISH ARMY ON
STATEN ISLAND DURING
THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

By DONALD R. SAINZ

(Part IV)

16th Regiment or Queens Light Dragoons: Raised in 1759 by Lieut. Col. John Burgoyne. Sent to America in Autumn of 1776. On December 13, 1776 this Regiment captured General Charles Lee. The Dragoons took part at Brandywine, and Germantown and were constantly engaged upon raids and skirmishes. Regiment returned to England after affair at Monmouth.

17th Regiment of Light Dragoons: Organized in 1759. First Cavalry Regiment sent to America after opening of Revolutionary War. Took part dismounted at Bunker Hill. Upon evacuation of Boston, the Regiment was sent to Halifax. Soon afterward it was ordered to Staten Island. Participated in Battles of 1776 and expedition to Danbury. Regiment was kept employed throughout the war, foraging for supplies both in the North and South. The 17th fought desperately at Charleston, Monks Corner, Camden, and Cowpens. Remained in America until 1783.

First Regiment of Foot Guards: The Brigade of Foot Guards or Household Troops, consisted of the First Regiment, (now the Grenadier Guards) the 3rd Regiment, (now the Scots Guards), and the Coldstream Regt, (now the Coldstream Guards). The three organized Regiments combined to form a Regiment for Service in America. These troops arrived on Staten Island on August 12, 1776, and took part in all the engagements of that year. The Foot Guards participated at Germantown as well as at Monmouth, the capture of Fort Lafayette and, the burning of Fairfield. Regiment sent to join Cornwallis in the South losing many officers and

(Continued on Page 13, Column 3)

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Editorial

During almost the entire year of 1948 the City of New York is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the consolidation of the present five boroughs into the greater City of New York.

Staten Island, the Borough of Richmond, will have its part both locally and in the city-wide celebration. Preparations are now underway, and the Staten Island Historical Society together with other public institutions will be adequately represented. A new Borough flag has been designed by Fernand O. Fingado, a curator of our Museum, and enthusiastically accepted by the authorities and will have prominent display on various occasions, and exhibits have been arranged for the Jubilee Exposition in Grand Central Palace.

Fifty years is not a long period in comparison with the more than 300-year history of our Island, but probably during that time more changes, and more radical changes, have come about than in our whole previous history. Many still living will remember the arguments for and against our accepting the "consolidation" plan as a part of the Greater City. Doubtless the years have brought many improvements but the controversy still remains, according to the point of view, as to whether the arrangement has been an unmixed benefit.

What the next fifty years will bring forth, nobody knows. But it is certain that changes will come even more rapidly and that much of our insularity and individual charm will have to be compromised or sacrificed altogether in the way of progress. It behooves, therefore, every one of us to put forth special effort to preserve all possible that is best in the Island we love.

Mr. Coles article in this issue of *THE HISTORIAN* is of special timeliness in that "the Billopp legend" is to have a prominent part in the Island Celebration. History or not, it is certainly a "good story" and well worth the prominence it has achieved.

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BRITISH ARMY

(Continued from Page 12, Column 3)

men at Guilford Courthouse. Regiment surrendered at Yorktown.

The Royal Artillery arrived in New York, July 8, 1773.

Royal Artillery: The Royal Artillery was raised in 1716. Eight Companies were with Howe at Philadelphia. Defenses around Philadelphia were largely erected by Artillerymen. The Artillery suffered greatly from the cold, being without great coats in Philadelphia. Remnants of the force was surrendered at Yorktown.

Irish Artillery: Arrived at Quebec. Served with Burgoyne until 1777.

Grenadiers and Light Infantry detached from various Regiments; serving in America from 1775 to 1783.

The Marines: Served from 1774-1783. Detached and served by companies — two Regiments.

THE HESSIAN CORPS.

From "Lefferts Uniforms of the Armies of the War of the American Revolution" — 1775-1783

This tried Army was obtained by King George III in Treaties with the German Princes during the winter of 1775-1776 as follows:

January 9, 1776 with Brunswick for troops, Infantry and Cavalry.

January 15, 1776 with Hesse Cassel for troops, Infantry and Artillery.

February 5, 1776 with Hesse Hanau for troops, Infantry and Artillery.

April 20, 1776 with Waldeck for troops, Infantry.

April 26, 1776 with Hesse Hanau for troops, Infantry, and Artillery.



Two Bronze Cross-Belt Plates

Found at Richmondtown, Staten Island

The GR Plate may be of a Guard Regiment or a stock plate for various regiments.

By the 5 treaties mentioned above the following number of Regiments and men were agreed upon. Hesse Cassel—15 Regts., of 5 Companies each 4, Grenadier Battalions; 2 Yager Company's, 2 Field Battery's of Artillery—in all 12500 men.

Hesse Hanau—1 Infantry Regiment and 1 Company of Artillery—900 men.

Waldeck—1 Infantry Regt. consisting of 750 men.

Brunswick—4 Infantry Regts., 1 Dragoon Regt., 1 Grenadier Regiment, and one Light Infantry Battalion, in all 4000 men—Total 18,150 men.

These Regiments sent to America in Spring of 1776. Brunswick and Hesse Hanau going to Quebec. Hesse Cassel and Waldeckus going to New York. These regiments were usually referred to as "Hessian" as the major portion were recruited from Hesse Cassel and, Hesse Hanau.

Brunswick and Hesse Hanau Regiments were the first to embark, being sent forward in two divisions. First division leaving Brunswick on February 22nd 1776 was joined at Portsmouth by the Hesse Hanau Regiment and sailed on April 4th all under command of Colonel Frederick Adolph Von Riedesel ranking as Major General.

The first Division consisting of the following regiments—

The Dragoon Regt. Riedesel under Lt. Col. F. Baum, 336 men

The Grenadier Battalion, under Lt. Col. H. C. Breyman, 564 men

Infantry Regt. Prince Frederick under Lt. Col. C. J. Pratorius, 680 men

Infantry Regt. Von Riedesel, under Lt. Col. E. L. W. v. Speth, 680 men

General Staff of Army, 22 men, Total 2,282 men.

The Hesse Hanau Regt., in four ships which joined the fleet at Portsmouth, was the "Regiment Crown-Prince," a Grenadier regiment of 668 men, under Colonel W. R. von Gall. A Fleet of 36 ships carrying the above German regts., the 21st British Foot, 4 companies of Royal Artillery and Generals Burgoyne, Phillips and others arrived at Quebec on June 1, 1776.

The second division of Brunswick Troops with the Hanau Artillery company in all about 2000 men, under the command of Colonel Von Specht, sailed June 26, 1776.

In the Second Division were the following Regts.

Infantry Regt. Von Specht under Col. J. F. Specht

Infantry Regt. Von Rhetz under Lt. Col. Von Ehrenkrock

Light Inf. Battalion & Yager Company under Major Von Barner

(To be Continued)

History of a Legend

(Continued from Page 11, Column 3)

The Morris account was used in *A History of Thomas and Anne Billopp Farmer and Some of their Descendants in America*, compiled from authentic Documents by Charles Farmer Billopp and dated 1907. The author says (page 17):

"Although the writer has confined his story within the limits of documentary evidence, there have been so many traditions relating to Captain Christopher Billopp, and the circumnavigation of Staten Island, that he is impelled to quote from Mr. Ira K. Morris, the author of 'A Biographical History of Staten Island,' Mr. Morris having assured the writer that his story of Christopher Billopp is founded on reliable data."

Here follows the story as quoted from Morris. The "quotes" are C. F. Billopp's. Much of it duplicates the previous story but there is some variation.

"In the spring of 1667 Christopher Billopp sailed from England in the *Bentley*, a small vessel carrying two cannons on her deck. She reached the banks of Newfoundland, after several weeks of tossing about on the ocean, and almost immediately started to take a cruise along the coast of New Netherlands. It is not known whether he was in the service of Charles the Second, or whether the venture was of a private nature.

"Up to the year 1668 it was a disputed question whether Staten Island belonged to New York, or New Jersey, and tired of the annoyance that this fact gave, the Duke of York decided that all islands lying in the harbor of New York, which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should belong to New York, otherwise to New Jersey. The possibility of sailing around this island in a day had long been disputed, and was generally denied, but Captain Billopp thought otherwise, and undertook the work, and was successful, with an hour to spare."

Now, curiously enough the quotation ceases and the following is added in Billopp's words:

"It is said he covered the deck of his vessel with empty casks, at first gaining sailing power, but when he came to the shallow portion of the stream, between the island and New Jersey, he used the barrels to buoy up his ship, and thus passed over the bar, and won the island for New York. In consideration for this service, the Duke of York presented Captain Billopp with a patent for a tract of land on the southwest end of the island, which he called 'Bentley Manor,' in honor of his sturdy little ship."

It will be noted that for the first time we have the barrels used to buoy the "Bentley" over the bar.

In 1909, Edward C. Delavan examined the Billopp story critically in Vol. III, page 37 of the *Proceedings of the Staten Island Association of Arts and Sciences*. Since he discredits the whole story, his account will be considered later.

In 1909, also, occurs the publication of the pamphlet "Staten Island and Staten Islanders," compiled by the Richmond Borough Association of Women Teachers. Under "Historic Landmarks" Mary Wolcott Green tells the story briefly on page 16 and expresses her indebtedness to Morris, "the historian of Staten Island." Also in the same year the *Historical Guide to the City of New York* by the City History Club of New York gives the story.

In a newspaper account from the *New York World*, 1910, "Tottenville or Bentley Manor, a War over a Name," the Duke personally engages Billopp in his role of navigator.

"If old Christopher Billopp, the original Staten Island boatman, could have foreseen the choice lot of trouble he would create when he sailed his little two-gun sloop around the island just to convince the Duke of York that the land belonged to New York and not to New Jersey it is doubtful if he would have felt so greatly compensated with the princely gift of 1,163 acres of Staten Island meadows which the grateful Duke bestowed upon him for his maritime ability. But Christopher Billopp's achievement was one of those historical snowballs which get started downhill somehow and go on rolling through the centuries, gathering enormous weight and leaving a wide track of consequences to mark its never-ending path . . .

"for although the Benteleites are now on top and Miss Millie (should be Minnie) Slight, the new Postmistress, who was appointed in February, has received a brand new cancelling stamp with the name "Bentley Manor" neatly cut in the die . . .

"In 1667, Christopher Billopp, an adventurous Englishman sailed from London for America in a small ship carrying two cannons. That is all that is known of it. It is not recorded whether he was in the service of Charles II or just on a little jaunt of his own. He arrived in New York, and liking the looks of the virgin hills of Staten Island located there. In 1668 the Duke of York had some difficulty in settling a dispute which had arisen regarding the boundary line between the territories of New York and New Jersey. He gave out the edict that 'all the islands lying the river or harbor of New York which could be circumnavigated within twenty-four hours

should belong to New York.' Then hearing that Christopher Billopp had a staunch little vessel he engaged him to sail around the island. Christopher did the trick in less than the requisite time, and the Duke rewarded him by giving him 1,163 acres of ground, at the site where Tottenville now stands.

Mr. Billopp called the ground 'The Manor of Bentley,' after his sloop."

A year later, in the "Staten Islander" for May 27, 1911 there is an unsigned article on "Staten Island, Its History in Discovery, Settlement, War, Society and Modern Development." This account shows an inventive elaboration, presumably based on Morris and perhaps written by him. The circumnavigation now takes 23 hours and 37 minutes, a much more exciting race.

"It may be interesting to know that there are a great many historical facts connected with the history of Staten Island and the many names which still bear witness to the previous occupation of the island by the Dutch.

"Among the anecdotes is one explaining why Staten Island, although surrounded by New Jersey, is still a part of the State of New York, and the explanation is found in the fact that, when a dispute arose between the Duke of York and Governor Berkeley of New Jersey in regard to the ownership of Staten Island, it was agreed between these two gentlemen that all islands in the mouth of the Hudson River which could be circumnavigated within twenty-four hours should be considered as belonging to the Duke of York.

"The English owner of a sloop called the "Bentley" was Christopher Billopp, to whom the task was assigned to make an attempt to circumnavigate Staten Island, and it is fortunate for the State of New York that he succeeded in doing this within three minutes less than the twenty-four hours assigned to him for the purpose, in that way securing this precious Island for the Duke of New York.

"As a reward for this feat he was given a grant of land embracing some 2,000 acres at the extreme southern end of the island, where Tottenville now stands, and on this property he erected, from brick and stone brought from England, the now famous and historic Billopp House, in which, as has been stated above, Lord Howe met the famous representatives of the Continental Congress."

In the next account the "excitement that held New Yorkers and New Jerseyites in suspense" during the circumnavigation is added. This is a newspaper story by Sarah Comstock in the New York Times, Sunday, September 7, 1913, and this same account later appears in her *Old Roads from the Heart of New York*, page 124.

"The Billopp House is considered by many to be the most interesting

house from a historical standpoint on Staten Island, and it is a melancholy sight to see it sinking toward decay. Built in 1668, it was from the first connected with some of the most interesting passages in the Island's history.

"The situation, back in the sixteen hundreds, was like this: Staten Island was first discovered in 1609 by Hendrick Hudson and named Staaten Eylandt, out of respect for the States General of Holland. (For a statement on this legend see Leng and Davis, Vol. 1, page 90.) There followed years of Dutch colonial government, during which this fine tidbit of land belonged to Nova Caesrea, the then name for New Jersey.

"Now James, the Duke of York and brother to Charles II, got a sort of rulership over all the King's possessions in America. Provinces which had been under Dutch control passed into English hands. Staten Island became a scene of discord; to the English and Dutch dissensions the French added their quarrels, and matters began to look somewhat like a Kilkenny-cat controversy.

"To settle affairs, the Duke finally came to a decidedly original decision. He ordained that all the islands in the harbor of New York which could be circumnavigated in twenty-four hours should belong to the colony of New York, otherwise Nova Caesarea, or New Jersey, was to possess them. The next point was to find the right man to attend to the circumnavigation.

"It happened at the right time that Capt. Christopher Billopp was stopping at Perth Amboy. His vessel, called the Bentley was a little affair, probably belonging to the British navy, although it seems to be a question as to whether it was of the merchant service.

"Billopp was chosen to perform the Duke's task. He was an excellent seaman, but, for all that, the feat was not going to be an easy one. He did not start out until he had racked his brains a bit to determine how he would be best able to include this large island in his trip.

"It was during this racking that he hit upon the idea—say rather inspiration—of the empty barrels. If he covered his deck with them would he not gain much sailing power? Thus laden he set out, and we can imagine the excitement that held New Yorkers and New Jerseyites in suspense at this critical moment.

"The upshot was that Capt. Billopp performed his feat. Nay, he more than performed it; a trifle over twenty-three hours sufficed him, and Staten Island was New York's.

"The Duke had a reward ready. So much pleased was he with Billopp's success that, instead of letting him re-

turn to England to make his home, he presented the Captain with 1,163 acres of Staten Island land and invited him to remain thereon."

This story practically completes the legend, except for a drawing of Billopp and the Bentley on page 53 of *Manna-Hattin*, published by the Manhattan Co. in 1929 and reprinted in the *Advance* of July 8, 1935. However, the story is kept alive in *Americana*, November, 1915 Kolff, *Short History of Staten Island*, 1918; New York Evening Post, June 28, 1920; "M and M" *Exposition*, 1922; *New York World*, April 1, 1923; *Historic Richmond*, 1924, and probably many others. This brings us up to the restoration of the Billopp or Conference House at which time the story receives wide publicity.

At this time the two "schools" of historical criticism met in the common cause of preserving the "Conference or Billopp House." On the one hand were Mr. Leng and Mr. Davis, conservative, careful historians with antecedents in Tuttle and Delavan and on the other were men like the genial Mr. Kolff with his beloved wit and penchant for story telling and with historical perspective gained largely from Morris. The initial invitation for a permanent Conference House Association was sent by the Rev. Henry D. Frost, dated Sept. 25, 1925 and the act of incorporation of the association was filed March 9, 1927. Rev. Frost became the first President, Mr. Leng the Secretary-Treasurer and Mr. Davis the Chairman of the Historical Committee. Mr. Kolff was in charge of the 1926 pageant and served as President from 1930 to 1932.

The publicity material on the Billopp House during these years is too lengthy to reprint and there are no new versions of the legend to warrant detailed consideration. However, many accounts appeared in New York papers and it is perhaps worthwhile to consider how widely the story was spread during this time: *New York Herald Tribune*, March 28, 1925; *New York World*, Sunday August 15, 1926; *S. I. Advance*, August 21, 1926; as well as June 30, 1927 and July 5, 1927; *New York Herald Tribune*, Sunday June 1, 1930 etc. These and others written during the next decade are all preserved in Mr. Davis's "Woolworth Books" along with other memorabilia of the Conference House, many mentioning the circumnavigation story.

During this same time one new volume appeared carrying the story. This was *Manor Houses and Historic Homes of Long Island and Staten Island* by Harold Donaldson Eberlein in 1928. Eberlein repeats the story as it has now been told so often.

In contrast, the *Condensed History of Staten Island* by Charles W. Leng and Edward C. Delavan, Jr. was brought out in 1924 by the Staten Island Edison Corporation. In this pamphlet the Bil-

(Committee of dates on the tablet at lopp grant is covered in a footnote to page 7: "Christopher Billopp had a grant of 1300 acres at what is now Tottenville in 1676." And in the copy before me the "1300" has been crossed out and "932" inserted in Mr. Davis's handwriting. The circumnavigation story is not even mentioned.

The whole Billopp matter was examined by Mr. Davis when he wrote the *Conference or Billopp House* in 1926, and various documents relating to Billopp were quoted in detail.

"There has been much speculation as to why Billopp received so large a tract of land. His father, Christopher Billopp, Gent. of London was said to be a 'friend of the King.' It is also possible that he at one time saved the life of the Duke of York during a naval engagement, and coming to America that he successfully sailed around Staten Island in twenty-four hours at the request of the Duke or the Governor. From the time that James, Duke of York, granted a part of his domain to John, Lord Berkeley, and Sir George Carteret in 1664, to the year 1833, when the matter was finally settled, New Jersey laid claim to Staten Island, the excitement over the matter often reaching a high pitch. So while Billopp's sailing exploit, as handed down by tradition, may have been informative to Governor Andros and the Duke, the matter became one of agreement." (page 51)

In the pamphlet *Short History of the Conference House*, 1926, Mr. Davis also says:

"a bold-spirited, sea-roving captain of the British navy with influence at court came to America with the newly appointed Governor Andros in 1674 as a lieutenant to a company of soldiers. He located in 1675 on a choice part of Staten Island, for which the next year he received a patent for 932 acres of land. Then he went as commander to New Castle on the Delaware in 1677, but misbehaving himself and quarrelling with Governor Andros, he returned to England, and for a time was again in the royal navy. When Governor Dongan was appointed, Captain Billopp became intimately associated with the local government and in 1687 received a grant for the Manor of Bentley, 1600 acres of land which included the land granted in 1676. Captain Billopp evidently came to America and returned to England several times and finally died in London in 1725."

Mr. Davis also included his estimate of the story in a four page "Addenda" to the *Conference or Billopp House*:

"Captain Hill sailed away on the *Elias*, and no one seems to have performed the conditions necessary to the granting of a patent or grant, such as was made to Johnson in 1674, and still

later to Captain Billopp. It may well have been, however, that Billopp first learned of the land to be had on Staten Island from his fellow naval officers, and under a new Governor and new conditions became the owner of a goodly estate. He may also before he became a captain in 1675, have served under some of them, possibly in America. It has been a matter of surprise that a captain in the British navy would willingly give up his command and come to America as a Second Lieutenant of a company of soldiers under Andros. Like Capt. Hill he came with a governor, and like him also Captain Billopp sought a reward as a servant of the King to whom he was known through his father and the Duke of York."

In 1930 the Leng and Davis History, *Staten Island and Its People*, was published. As we have seen both Mr. Leng and Mr. Davis had enjoyed considerable experience with the Billopp story and the preservation of the Conference House as a "National Shrine." In one sense, their account is a revision and condensation of previous material already gathered for Mr. Davis's *Conference of Billopp House*, yet the controversy over the truth of the circumnavigation story had made both the authors aware of the need for careful examination of sources as well as need for "real" proof of their point of view. The three following quotations give their best judgment.

"During the administration of Governor Dongan, the claim of the proprietors of East Jersey to Staten Island occasioned much correspondence. This claim arose from the wording of a grant made in 1665 by the Duke of York of land westward of Long Island "bounded on the east by the Hudson River;" if the Hudson River emptied through Arthur Kill, Staten Island was east thereof and in New York; but if the Hudson emptied through the Narrows, it was not. In 1672, Governor Carteret of New Jersey attempted to cut hay on Staten Island despite the purchase in 1670 from the Indians by Lovelace. In 1675, and again in 1681, Governor Carteret renewed his claims but unsuccessfully; and once more in 1684. In 1704, an equally unsuccessful attempt was made, interesting because, in conjunction with those of 1681 and 1682, it shows that the question was not settled by Captain Billopp sailing around the Island in 1676 and thereby earning the Manor of Bentley." (Vol. I, page 132.)

* * *

"From this mingling of fact and fiction has grown, by the admiration of historians possessed of some imagination, the story of the Waldenses of Stony Brook, embellished even by an alleged illustration of their church (Morris I; 40) . . . It is to be regretted that, notwithstanding this report

Borough Hall) the Historical Tablet in the Borough Hall still bears the erroneous statement "1650, First Church erected . . . by Waldensians," which ought to be removed.

"The same tablet contains also other gross error as shown in the same report, viz: . . . 1668, Staten Island separated from New Jersey. Besides others of minor importance." (Vol. I, page 109.) * * *

"About 100 patents had been granted by 1679. Some of these require particular notice but we shall first mention the Robert Ryder map described by Mr. Tuttle in *Proceedings Staten Island Institute A. & S. Vol. II*, 1924, pages 91-107. This map dated 1670 but possibly completed in 1676 shows the following place names . . .

(9) Billops. This was at the southwestern end of Staten Island, and south of the present Tottenville. Captain Christopher Billopp had come to this country in 1674 as second lieutenant of Major Andros' company. His father was a merchant in London and described as a friend to the King. Captain Billopp must have been in possession of the south end of Staten Island as early as 1675, for the Council Minutes read as follows: 'At a Councell Aug. 5, 1675, The Neck of Land Capt. Billopp is upon is judged to bee about 1300 acres.' A patent was granted to him on March 25, 1676. The reason for this grant so much larger than other grants made by Andros, may have been the intimate relations between Billopp's father and the King; or it may be that there is at least some truth in the tradition that the grant was his reward for sailing around Staten Island in twenty-four hours." (Vol. I, page 120.)

A good many other references occur after 1930, but, the pattern of the story is set and we need not concern ourselves with additional quotations.

We may conclude this part of the article with a summary. Our first record of the circumnavigation story supposed to have occurred in 1668 is a newspaper article in 1873, and was attributed by the author to Gabriel P. Disosway who probably included it in a series of articles about 1865. There are no known antecedents of the Disosway account. Subsequently the story was reprinted in various forms, pamphlets, newspapers and histories. The most inventive statement of the story was given by Morris in his *History*. Widely sown during the succeeding years, dissemination received its greatest impulse at the time of the formation of the Conference House Association with its attendant publicity. Throughout its history, careful historians have either denied the story outright or accepted it as at best an unsubstantiated legend.

A second article will examine critically the sources of the legend.