

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF CONESVILLE.

SCENERY—MANOKILL FALLS—STRYKER BROTHERS' TANNERY—STEVEN'S MILL—TOLLING A GRIST—COLBY REED—FIRST STORE—CONTRAST OF SCENERY—HUNTING GROUNDS—INDIAN RELICS—DISE PURCHASE OF LAND—URY RICHTMYER—THE DISE SONS—LITIGATION—PETER RICHTMYER—HIS CAPTURE BY INDIANS—ESCAPE—REBUILT HIS HOUSE—OPENS AN INN—HUMPHREY'S—ADDITIONAL SETTLERS—DAIRYING—PROMINENT SETTLERS—TOWN FORMED—BOUNDARIES—JONATHAN CONE—TOWN RECORDS.

TO the visitor approaching the town from the east, a mountainous surface presents itself, whose wildness impresses unfavorably either in a fertile or romantic point of view, but entering upon the western border with the waters of the Manokill leaping over the precipitous ledge that Nature has so regularly laid as a barrier to the inundations of the Schoharie, a different impression is made. As the tumbling foam dashes from rock to rock with the deep thundering of greater falls, and sends its spray over the path it once followed, ages upon ages ago, our genius is at once lured to admire and find beauty, grandeur and even romance in each object that surrounds us. Upon the very point of the rocks, above a crumbling wall, stands the remnant of a once busy tanning enterprise, built by Barent and Peter M. Stryker, in 1830. It seems to have been a very singular location for such a business when so many more favorable ones were presented along the banks of the stream above. The progenitors of the Stryker family who are and have been so numerous in this section of the County, were two brothers, Barent and Peter, who came from New Jersey about the year 1800. They purchased the lands lying around the falls and east to the hamlet of Strykerville. Barent settled upon the farm occupied by Rev. Loren Cole, while Peter settled upon that of his grandson,

George H. Stryker. One of Barent's daughters married Colby Reed, a native of Vermont, who engaged in the mercantile business at Strykerville in connection with John Stryker, about the year 1815. They were the first merchants. The co-partnership was dissolved a few years after, and Reed located at Blenheim Hill, while Stryker continued and was followed by Peter M., son of Peter, who built the tannery in connection with his cousin Barent. They also built a mill near. Gershom Stevens also built a mill where the Thomas mill stands, about the year 1835. Stevens was the object of a joke, such as millers are subject to hear, regardless of their degree of integrity. A farmer brought a large grist to be ground, when three of his sons were working in the mill. The father coming in while the grist was in the hopper, he asked one of the boys if he had "tolled the grist," to which he replied "he had." Another son soon came round and was also asked if "he had tolled that grist?" Upon being answered in the affirmative the old gentleman passed out but soon returned and accosted the third son with the question, "Have you tolled that grist?" "Yes, sir," he replied, "I have." "Are you sure you did?" asked the father, "Yes, sir, I am pretty sure I did." "Well, boys are so careless," said Stevens, "I will toll it myself and make sure of it; boys are not always reliable."

Considerable business was done in the hamlet of Strykerville for several years, but the enterprise of Gilboa village proved a death stroke to the place. In following up the stream the fertile and well kept intervalle is in deep contrast to the mountain sides that are still covered with the forest and present a striking idea of the country previous to its settlement by the whites. Here, we can imagine, were the hunting grounds of the Delawares, Mohawks and the tribes along the Hudson, ere the stroke of enterprise resounded to annihilate the race and Nature's wildness. At various places along the creek, relics of the race, such as stone arrows, rough-hewn knives and hatchets were found by the early settlers, each bearing a different ingenuity, perhaps peculiar to the tribe to which they belonged.

The lands of this town were chiefly pur-

chased by the Duse family and one Ury Richtmyer. Letters patent of the year 1754 were granted to the latter for two tracts, one lying in the western and the other in the eastern part of the town. He settled east of the stone bridge and died in 1769, and his was supposed to be the first death in the town. He was a German and became connected with several others in the purchase of land, chief among whom was John Duse, whose family became notorious as friends of the Crown in the Revolution. The father left a large property, and in his day was one of the leading business men of Rondout. The sons lived upon the land, and in their frequent visits to the Hudson surprised the frugal inhabitants by exhibiting their science in drinking rum and throwing silver coins in the river. They thereby became reduced financially, and whether honorably or dishonorably, to replenish their purses, they instituted suits against those who had purchased and leased lands of them, and also against Richtmyer. They were in litigation many years in the Kings Court but were unsuccessful in the end, and were left with but little means. Ury Richtmyer was followed by a son John, whose family we believe to be extinct in the County. Mrs. Ury Richtmyer was taken to the middle fort upon commencement of hostilities in Schoharie, and died through fright, as stated in Chapter III of this work. Peter Richtmyer, one of three brothers who settled at Hartman's dorf wandered off to the Manorkill when but a young man, and settled with Ury. He built a log-house near where George Van Dyke's mansion stands and cleared quite a farm by the time the war began. While working upon the flat below the house one afternoon, he was surprised by a squad of Indians and a Tory and taken prisoner. The captors had been upon a raid near the Hudson and had a few prisoners that were bound with cords and compelled to carry the plunder they had obtained. Peter was driven along but his family escaped. The party followed the creek to the Schoharie and down that stream to the Patchin place, where they turned up the Westkill and encamped for the night near the saw-mill. Peter was not bound but watched closely, and when called upon to turn in for the night, he jumped to escape and was confronted by a

Tory neighbor, with a musket pointed at his breast. Seeing the gun was his own, with a worthless flint, he pressed on past the Tory and was urged by the fruitless click! click! of the old gun. He returned to his house and after finding his family, pushed on that night for the Hudson where he left his wife, while he returned to the Upper fort and did duty under Hager to the close of the war. After that event he rebuilt, and in 1789 opened an inn, the first one in that part of the County, and began to accumulate a fine property. He was followed by his sons Abram, George and Daniel, who built the present Van Dyke mansion, and did a paying business. Below "Richtmyer's" was another hotel long known as "Humphreys," and around those two houses the chief business attractions of the town clustered for many long years.

After the war closed, quite a number of families from the eastern States and the older settled portions of the County located in the town, the Yankee climbing upon the hills while the Dutch and Germans settled in the valleys. The former true to his nature, adopted stock raising, which has culminated in dairying by all classes, and been the means of raising the standard of the town among other towns of the County in productiveness nearly fifty per cent within the period of twenty-five years. The prominent families that moved in the town in the fore part of the century, beside those already mentioned were:—Patrie, Shew, Scoville, Kringle, Hubbard, Luring, Crane, Mattice and Allerton. Owing to the large territory of the town of Broome and the distance the people of a goodly portion of the town were compelled to go to transact town business, a petition was forwarded to the Legislature for the formation of a new town. On the 3d of March, 1836, an act was passed to divide the town of Broome and the town of Durham:—

"Beginning at the centre of Schoharie Creek, in the County of Schoharie, where the Manor creek empties in the same; thence north forty-six degrees east one hundred and seventy-six chains, to the northwest corner of a lot in Scott's patent known as the "Leming lot," thence east along the lines of lots in the said patent three hundred and twenty chains to the east line of

said patent, thence south along the east line of the said patent twenty-one chains to the north line of Stringer's patent; thence east along the north line of the said mentioned patent, one hundred and seventy-six chains, to the east line of the County of Schoharie; thence southerly along the said east line of the said County, to the north line of the County of Greene; thence eastwardly along the north line of the said County of Greene, thirty-four chains: thence south two degrees east, one hundred and sixty-six chains to the dividing line between the towns of Durham and Windham; thence westwardly and northwardly along the said dividing line and the dividing line between Durham and Prattsville, until it intersects the north line of the County of Greene, thence westwardly along the said County line, to the centre of the said Schoharie creek, and thence northwardly down the centre of the said creek to the place of beginning.

"(Sec. 4). The first annual town meeting in the said new town of Conesville, shall be held on the third Tuesday of April next, (1837,) at the inn of Abraham Richtmyer therein, commencing at ten o'clock in the forenoon of that day.

"Peter Stryker, Joshua Nowlen and Chancellor Spenser, or any two of them, may preside at, conduct and record the proceedings of the first annual town meeting, and shall have the like power for such purpose as are vested in the justices of the peace and town clerk, by article second, title second of chapter eleven of the first part of the Revised Statutes; and they or two of them, shall cause notices in writing of the time and place of holding such first annual town meeting to be posted at four or more of the most public places in the said new town at least eight days before the time of such meeting."

The town was named after Rev. Jonathan Cone, a man whose Christian qualities endeared him to all classes throughout this part of the country.

The earliest records of the town were lost, and we are therefore debarred from giving them, and favoring the reader with matter that usually proves interesting. Town records, in general, are poorly kept and preserved, although

more care is taken at the present time than formerly. Too much attention has been given to nominate officers that would make an election sure, instead of looking for necessary qualifications, but at present all classes receiving some educational advantages, it is hard to find one who is so deficient as to be incompetent, and hence a more methodical record is kept.

The following have been elected supervisors with the years of service:

- 1836—Abram Richtmyer.
- 1837—Joshua Nowlen.
- 1838— do
- 1839—Parent Stryker.
- 1840—Peter Stryker.
- 1841—Chancellor Spenser.
- 1842—Ira Nowlen.
- 1843—Joshua Nowlen.
- 1844—Chancellor Spenser.
- 1845—Elisha Hammond.
- 1846— do
- 1847—Lewis P. Mattice.
- 1848—William Lamont.
- 1849— do
- 1850— do
- 1851—William Lee.
- 1852—Orluff M. Humphrey.
- 1853—Loren P. Cole.
- 1854—James Hay.
- 1855—Erastus Case.
- 1856—Lewis P. Mattice.
- 1857—J. D. Newell.
- 1858—Newel Day.
- 1859—Loren P. Cole.
- 1860—Lewis P. Mattice.
- 1861—Ira D. Humphrey.
- 1862—Peter H. Richtmyer.
- 1863—Lewis P. Mattice.
- 1864—Loren P. Cole.
- 1865—Peter Couchman.
- 1866— do
- 1867— do
- 1868— do
- 1869— do
- 1870— do
- 1871— do
- 1872— do
- 1873—Stephen J. Hitchcock.
- 1874—D. H. Miller.

- 1875—D. B. Thorpe.
 1876— do
 1877—George VanDyke.
 1878— do
 1879—Loren P. Cole.
 1880—Peter Couchman.
 1881—Alexander W. Patrie.
 1882—G. Gaylord.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

HON. PETER COUCHMAN.

Peter Couchman was born in the town of Broome, July 28, 1833, and traces his ancestry back to Germany. His great-grandfather came to this country about the year 1780, and settled in Dutchess county. Philip Couchman, his father, lived in Canada a number of years, and was living there at the outbreak of the war between England and the United States in 1812. He was a Whig in politics, and would have probably remained so had he not become disgusted with the actions of the Whigs who lived as neighbors to him while in Canada; and expressed their sympathies for Great Britain while the Democrats were espousing the cause of their country. He left the party then and there.

The subject of our sketch is the son of Philip Couchman and Zilpha Winans, of Albany county; he is the youngest of a family of ten children, eight of whom are now living. Mr. Couchman lived at home until his father's death in 1857. He attended the district schools of his native town; and in 1862 was united in marriage to Mary Bloodgood, of Conesville. He first entered the political field as a candidate for Supervisor of the town of Conesville, in 1865, when he was elected by a handsome majority. As a proof of his popularity we need only say that he was re-elected for eight consecutive terms; and again he came before the people in 1871 as a candidate for Member of Assembly, when he was elected, running far

ahead of his ticket; he was re-elected the following year. Being a Democrat, in a Legislature largely Republican, the heavy committee work naturally fell to the party in power. During his first term he served on the Committee of Internal Affairs of Towns and Counties, and on Committee on Expenditures of the House. During his second term he served on the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Charitable and Religious institutions. Mr. Couchman rendered good service to the people of his County in securing for them a deed to the lower Stone Fort in Schoharie, a relic of the dark and bloody days that are connected with the history of the County. It had been purchased by the State, years ago for an arsenal. Adjutant-General Rathbone recommended the sale of all the State arsenals, this one among the number, but through the exertion and influence of Mr. Couchman it was deeded to Schoharie, free of cost. The building was used as a fort and church, and is in a remarkable state of preservation. The old building is an object of great interest, and is held more than dear by the descendants of the glorious old patriots that took shelter within its walls.

In 1880 Mr. Couchman was repeatedly urged by many of the reliable Democrats to accept of the nomination for Congress from his district, which comprised Ulster, Greene and Schoharie counties. The nomination would have been equivalent to an election, as the district was strongly Democratic, yet Mr. Couchman refused the proposed honor, much against the wishes of his friends, owing to the fact that he perceived a growing feeling in the district against electing a Schoharie man to the office. The wisdom of his course became apparent, when, as the result of the election, the one who was nominated from Schoharie county was badly beaten, and owed his defeat to this one reason.

Of Mr. Couchman's brothers, John W. served in the Legislature of 1860; three brothers are ministers, Milo and John are Methodists, and Philip is a minister of the Christian Church. In connection with Mr. Couchman's public career we must mention the fact that the handsome and commodious court-house at Scho-



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harie was built while he was in the Board of Supervisors, and we simply write the truth when we say that but for the position taken by him and one or two of his associates, instead of the fine structure we now see, there would have been something decidedly inferior.

Mr. Couchman is a farmer, and makes his business as such a sort of profession. A large part of his time at home is devoted to his library and the news of the day. His probity, ability, and geniality, have secured to him the confidence and esteem of the people of his district in a marked degree. Quickness of discernment, readiness of action and undoubted integrity are among his most decided characteristics. He has been a Democratic wheel-horse in his town for years, and is well versed in general politics.

CHAPTER IX.

HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF BROOME.

WHEN FORMED—NAME CHANGED—CATSKILL CREEK—INDIAN TRAIL—GENERAL ASPECT—FIRST SETTLERS—TORIES' ROUTE—ADDITIONAL SETTLERS—DANIEL SHAYS—HIS LIFE—REBELLION AND DEATH—DAVID WILLIAMS—HIS LIFE—INCIDENTS RELATING TO CAPTURE OF ANDRE—COMMENTS ON WILLIAMS AND ANDRE—THEIR PRINCIPLES COMPARED—WILLIAMS' DEATH—BURIAL—SON AND GRANDSON—MOUNT WILLIAMS—LIVINGSTONVILLE—ASA STARKWEATHER—HIS OFFICIAL LIFE—HIS ARGUMENT IN CONVENTION—DEATH—ADAM MATTICE—PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH—METHODIST CHURCH—DRAFT OF 1813—SMITHTON—HUBBARD'S—THE VLY—SUPERVISORS—BOUNDS.

THIS town was one of the original six that were formed March 1, 1797, and bore the name of Bristol. Upon the 6th of April, 1808, for reasons unknown to the writer, the name

was changed to Broome, in honor of the then acting Lieutenant Governor, John Broome, who was repeatedly elected with Daniel D. Tompkins, as Governor. Undoubtedly, had not death closed his successful and honored career in 1811, he would have retained the position to the close of Governor Tompkins administration, at least, in 1816, as he was so highly admired by the people.

The Catskill creek takes its rise in this town, and was formerly fed by a large swamp, called the vlaie, (now pronounced *vly*,) now drained, which has been a marked locality since the Aborigines of the country formed a path leading from the Hudson River, near Catskill, to the Schoharie valley and the wigwams of the western tribes of the confederation. It was along this path following the Catskill creek, to the *Vly*, that the first German settlers of the Schoharie valley traversed (as noted in Chapter II,) in the winter time of 1713. Along this path also the Stockbridge and their more southern neighboring tribes passed, to reach the hunting grounds of *Skochalie*—or her medicinal waters, long, long before the “remnant of tribes” formed one, along the course of her beautiful river. Perhaps along this path the valiant Mohegans in deadly strife, for the supremacy of power, and again to pounce upon the weaker tribes of Manhattan and Hackensack, to extort tribute and obedience to their King and councils. Of that primitive and well beaten path nothing is left but the rippling waters that so often slaked the thirst, and guided the steps of the bold athletic warriors through the mighty forest of giant timber. Civilization has marked a change. The forest has disappeared; along the romantic stream and upon the sides of the lofty hills—spacious fields now are seen whose luxuriant verdure are as smiles of Providence upon the labors of intelligence and civilization. Instead of the war whoop or death yell of the savage, and the howling of wild beasts, that once awakened the echoes of the forest, peace is found in the grazing herds, and in the shouts of happy and prosperous yeomen, which are heard amid the clatter of farming implements, gathering the abundant harvest, which was made possible through the labors, anxieties, hopes, fears and