

5-23-00

Tucca-

Ramma-

Hacking.

TUCCA-RAMMA-HACKING.

BY E. VOSSELLER.

FLEMINGTON, N. J.

H. E. DEATS,

1901.

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GEORGE W. BURROUGHS, PRINTER,
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FROM the high ground near the middle of Morris Co., two little streams start on their winding way to the ocean. One takes a zig-zag southerly course into Somerset Co., the other with a great sweep to the southwest into Hunterdon Co., makes a turn which causes it to run north for some miles from its mouth, though its first few miles are almost exactly south. About four miles north of Somerville in Somerset Co., these two streams, the North Branch and the South Branch unite and form the Raritan. The neighborhood where these streams join, the Indians called *Tucca-Ramma-Hacking*, meaning the flowing together of waters.

Of this region Cornelius Van Tienhoven, Secretary of the New Netherlands writing in 1650 says,

“This is the handsomest and pleasantest country that man can behold. It furnished the Indians with abundance of maize, beans, pumpkins, and other fruits. It was abandoned by them for two reasons. First finding themselves unable to resist the southern Indians, they migrated further inland. Second this country was flooded every spring, frequently destroying their supply of maize, stored in holes under ground.”

Along these beautiful meadows the red man fished and hunted finding an ample supply. Here he wooed his dusky mate. Here his boys learned the use of bow and arrow, and stone ax. Here his girls learned the gentler arts of housekeeping and of providing grain and fruits for winter. Here he ate and drank and slept ; what then ? He ate and drank and slept again, with little incentive beyond, except some time to reach the happy hunting grounds.

But there came a day when the Dutch invasion from Long Island pushing up the Raritan reached this region and tract after tract of their lands went out of their possession. But let it be remembered

that these lands were always bought, and never stolen from the Indians.

“It is a proud fact in the history of New Jersey that every foot of her soil has been obtained from the Indians by fair and voluntary purchase and transfer, a fact that no other state of the Union, not even the land that bears the name of Penn can boast of.” So said Samuel L. Southard, New Jersey’s most brilliant Senator who reached the unique distinction of being an United States Senator while his father was a Congressman. On the same occasion, Sha-wus kukh-kung an educated Delaware said “Not a drop of our blood have you spilled in battle, not an acre of our land have you taken but by our consent.”

The prosaic name for Tucca-Ramma-Hacking was Two Bridges. These spanned the North Branch near its mouth, the first, as you go toward Somerville, reaching to a little island about two-thirds the way across and the shorter one landing you on the east side of the river. These seemed a sufficient warrant for the name, but tradition says the name referred to the fact that there was a

bridge also over the South Branch near its mouth to accommodate a road running up the south side of the Raritan. It is unlikely. In that case they would have called the place Three Bridges.

In the early days the great market for this section and the country west of it was New Brunswick. There was a great deal of travel over these bridges, the farmers hauling their grain to New Brunswick and bringing back provisions of various sorts. The first house over the bridge towards Somerville was kept as a tavern. Of course that house has disappeared, but in a new house a little further back from the river, our old time Flemington neighbor, Elisha Kuhl, successfully cultivates one of those splendid Tucca-Ramma-Hacking farms where "the valleys stand so thick with corn, they laugh and sing."

Before these bridges were built the stream was forded a little below where the bridges afterward stood. A woman on horseback from the neighborhood of Readington crossed over one morning to do some errand below, and on her return the stream had risen so much as to be dangerous and she was

advised at the tavern not to try to cross. She said she must get home for she had left her little baby there in the morning and she must get back to it. So she made the attempt, but the cruel waters swept horse and rider out into the Raritan and both were drowned.

The following extract from the deed, taken from the Elizabethtown Bill in Chancery, relates to the part of these lands lying at the mouth of the South Branch.

“That Paywassen, Indian, by his deed dated Aug. 14, 1688 for the consideration therein named did sell to the Proprietors of East Jersey, a tract of land beginning at Holland’s Brook and from thence as the river runs to the meeting of the branches of the Raritan and to run as far back as the said Paywassen and other Indians their lands run as by the said deed, recorded in Liber B. page 534.”

In 1716 Andreas Ten Eyck bought the north half of this tract, about 275 acres. His son Col. Abraham and wife Sarah were buried on a bluff on this farm about one hundred yards back

from the mouth of the South Branch, as if they were loath to be carried away from these beautiful surroundings. It is stated on their tomb-stones that Col. Abraham Ten *Eick* died Nov. 1812 aged 81 years and 331 days, and that Sarah wife of Col. Abraham Ten *Eyck* died Jan. 2, 1811, aged 101 years and nine months, showing that she was her husband's senior by nineteen years.

Col. Abraham's grandson Andrew Ten Eyck who lived here, was very fond of show. He kept many fine horses, wagons and carriages with harness and whips to match. If he had occasion to do a little trading at the stores in Somerville he would likely go with four horses and a big farm wagon. He drove by word, without lines, and never tied his horses to a tie-post. They were large and fat and lazy, and when he said whoa, they stood fast until he gave them another command.

On one occasion he came to the office of our late Vice Chancellor, A. V. Van Fleet, when he was a leading lawyer here in Flemington and introducing himself threw down \$20.00 as a retaining fee,

saying he thought of instituting a law suit and in that case would want his services. But that was the last of it, the law suit never came off.

In such ways he cut a pretty broad swath for many years. He inherited three farms, two of which were un-incumbered. He died in a hut on an Illinois prairie, so poor he had not money enough to bury him.

Lot No. 37 of these original purchases, containing 500 acres bought by Hendrick Corson in the same year 1688, represents that part of Tucca-Ramma-Hacking lying at the mouth of the North Branch.

In 1753 Corson sold the south part of his lot to Peter Dumont. This was inherited by his son John Baptist Dumont, and by his will devised for their life time to his sisters, Brachia and Phebe. These were two very amiable gentlewomen, who were Aunt "Bracky" and Aunt Phebe to the whole neighborhood. At their decease it came into the market, and my brother John Vosseller bought it. He sold off all but 100 acres, cleared

up and enriched the land, built a new barn and remodelled the house. These improvements, added to its unusually handsome location, made of it a model homestead. Here he resided until that beautiful Easter morning of 1900, when he entered into rest.

Just back of this farm in Dec. 1753, Jacob Van Nest was brutally murdered by one of his slaves. The occasion is said to have been the taking of a leaf of tobacco out of the negro's box. He was arrested, taken to the county seat, then at Millstone, tried and condemned to be burned publicly at the stake. This execution was a great occasion. Sheriff Van Doren enforced the penalty. It is said that many of the negroes of the surrounding country were present forming the inner circle, while the whites formed the outer circle, around the fire. During the burning, the sheriff on his horse with a drawn sword in hand, rode between the spectators and the fire to keep the former at a proper distance.

In those good old days, when they punished, they punished ; and they were quick about it.

As an illustration,—In that same neighborhood on June 20, 1780, Tobie a negro slave was indicted for a felony. He pleaded not guilty and “put himself on his God and the Country.” On the 21st he was tried and found guilty and sentenced to be hung on the 24th, and the penalty was duly enforced.

“The Dutch Reformed Church of North Branch,” organized about 1717 built its first edifice here on the brow of the hill about two hundred yards west of Two Bridges on the north side of the “big” road, that is, the “old York Road,” and on the west side of the road running up the North Branch. It was built of logs with a framed addition which seems to suggest growth in the congregation soon after the organization. It stood on ground now belonging to the widow of Mr. John Vosseller and tradition says it was burned down. This is the organization now known as the Reformed Church of Readington located about three miles west of this first building, in the village of Readington where a frame church was erected and the first service held Oct. 7, 1739.

During the Revolution the affairs of Queen's, now Rutgers College were carried on for some time in this log church. The faculty and students of this college were more than once obliged to de-camp from New Brunswick on account of the proximity of the British forces. The New Jersey Gazette of May 5, 1778, announces that "the business of Queen's College in New Jersey formerly carried on in New Brunswick, is begun at North Branch of Raritan, in the County of Somerset in a pleasant and retired neighborhood ; lodging and board to be had in decent families at 30 £ per annum. Apply to John Taylor A. M., tutor at place aforesaid."

Another notice in the same paper of Jan. 24, 1779, gives information that "the College is still carried on at the North Branch of Raritan, and that the neighborhood is so far distant from headquarters that the army does not at least interfere with the business of the College."

This John Taylor was "1st Colonel New Jersey State Regiment." As late as Sept. 25, 1779 he wrote from this place to Gov. Livingston assign-

ing his duties in College as a reason for some delay in forwarding certain reports concerning the Militia. During the war his time appears to have been divided between his duties as Colonel of a militia regiment and those pertaining to his professorship.

A little north of the Church, but on the east side of the road running up the North Branch, stood a blacksmith shop. In recent years various iron scraps have been unearthed there. Among other things the two halves of a chain cannon ball and the bottoms of smoothing irons, and near where the church stood a fine looking spur, which some horse-backer had lost. A few English copper coins and a few Nova Cesarcas or horse heads, also have been found there.

Tradition has it that to this shop Gen. Washington came and had the shoes of his horse taken off and all turned around so that as he travelled in any direction he seemed to be going directly opposite. A crazy conceit. The truth probably was that he had his horse's shoes reset and trans-

ferred from right foot to left that they might wear longer.

It is said a wheelwright shop stood a little to the southwest of the Church. It is certain that a few graves clustered about the Church, but whose, none can tell. "Dust to dust and the spirit to God who gave it."

Rev. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen was the only pastor of this Log Church in the wilderness. At the same time he was Pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church of Three Mile Run now New Brunswick, of Six Mile Run, and of Raritan now Somerville. He was a strong man and for about thirty years exercised a powerful influence for good over a territory of more than two hundred square miles, embracing now more than fifty congregations.

The great Whitefield visited him in 1739 and made the following record in his journal. "At New Brunswick some thousands gathered from various parts of the country, among whom there had been a considerable awakening by the instrumentalities of Rev. Mr. Frelinghuysen." This

refers to an extensive revival which had reached all four of his churches and which resulted in the conversion of about two hundred, a very large number for such a sparsely settled region.

Mr. Frelinghuysen deserves to rank among the eminent men of his times. His father was a minister, his five sons were ministers and his two daughters married ministers. Some of his descendants have been greatly honored both by our state and nation, and have adorned every station in which they have been placed.

One of them Hon. Theodore was nominated by the Whigs for Vice-President on the ticket with Henry Clay.

Only a little distance up the North Branch is a place called "The Broad Axe Hole." The water there was deep and the fishing excellent. A funny thing happened there which came near being serious. A large tree had blown over into the water, but was held fast by its roots. Tim McCarthy, whose nationality perhaps you can guess, was assigned the task of cutting off the tree near the bank, so it might be drawn out. He stepped out

on the tree and deliberately cut it off between himself and the shore, so that presently with a great splash down went the tree with Tim and his axe into the deep water and it was with considerable trouble that he was pulled out. But he held on to his axe.

Shad used to be very plentiful about the head waters of the Raritan and for some distance up its Branches. An old gentleman told me that as he was fishing one night in the North Branch he heard a splashing and found that a great fish was making its way up the stream. He gave chase in his boat, but could not overtake it until they came to a rift, where the fish was impeded, and then being determined to capture it, he threw himself upon it, but the fish shook him off and went on up the river. He thought likely it was the King of the Shad. About a mile up the North Branch there is a little village called Milltown. It had a grist mill, woolen mill, saw mill, general store, grocery, blacksmith and wheelwright shop, school house and five dwellings. A considerable business centered here, along in the forties. Now there is

a rather feeble Grist Mill and one or two houses. The whole village and three farms about it, were owned by Michael Van Derveer. Freshets sometimes tore out his dam and occasionally flooded his Grist Mill. He was therefore very sensitive on the subject of rain. At a time when there had been two days of rain he became very anxious and jumping up early on the next day he looked out of the window and remarked, "raining again like a damn fool."

When he had charge of the General Store, he kept no clerk, and often locked the store and went to the mill. If a customer hunted him up, he always inquired what was wanted, and if the proposed purchase was a small one he declared he hadn't any, had just sold out.

At times he bought a great deal of grain. Once he loaded his Mill so heavily with corn that it collapsed and several hundred bushels were carried down the stream. He allowed the mill to remain in that ruined condition for years, before re-building it. A mad dog that was chased across

the meadows ran into these ruins and was shot there.

Here I had my first experiences in school and as I recall them now I am led to say that to be a schoolmaster in those days was to be a brute. In 1847 this school district was united to the one immediately west of it. The building was moved west a half mile and enlarged. With this change came deliverance from tyranny. Rev. Dr. Jno. B. Thompson, his brothers Henry P. and Abraham, and their father Hon. Joseph Thompson were the men who rescued the children of Tucca-Ramma-Hacking from shameful barbarities, and school life became a pleasure. They introduced modern text books and modern methods. The school room was kept clean and was beautified with flowers from the school flower garden. Blackboards made their appearance. The morning session was opened with a reading from scripture followed by a brief prayer. Singing was indulged in at the opening and closing of each session. A love of history was inculcated by these teachers, who would now and then read to the school an account

of some stirring event in our country's life. Friday afternoons were devoted to the reading of compositions and to declamations. The parents were invited in to enjoy these "exercises." Sometimes we had a considerable audience to face and we were allowed to wear our Sunday clothes.

A colored boy dropped into poetry, and wrote some very funny things we thought. One verse was like this :—

“When I do see a great big rat,
Then I do look around
To find a stone or a brick bat
To knock the rascal down.”

After two or three efforts of this kind, Dr. Thompson strongly advised him to stick to prose. One fellow who was always blundering began his oration with “Conscript Fathers ! I have come down to you from a former generation ! Heaven has kindly lengthened out your lives that you might behold this auspicious day !”

The advanced class in Grammar were appointed the “Critics” of the school. They were on the alert to catch up ungrammatical sentences and

there was great joy among them when now and then the teacher would be caught making a slip of the tongue. In this way the practical use of grammar was shown to the whole school. In these and other ways a great interest in the school was aroused among the pupils and the parents, as well. In the Cedar Grove near by, from which the school took its name, we boys built a miniature railroad one of the arch bridges of which was considered so fine and strong that it was the talk of the neighborhood.

Going to school at Tucca-Ramma-Hacking was fun! The Township Superintendent, Geo. W. Vroom, declared this to be the best school in the Township.

Dr. John B. Thompson has embalmed this name in his "History of Education in New Jersey," a copy of which has lately come into the possession of our Society.

Along in the fifties a certain teacher fell violently in love with one of the handsome girls of this neighborhood. Dr. Thompson in a spirit of mischief wrote some verses on the subject and had

them printed. A single verse will give some idea of their flavor.

“It seems as if some wretched wight
At my heart strings were whacking
So much I love this lovely maid
Of Tucca-Ramma-Hacking.

* It is interesting to know that this severe attack of heart ache was cured in the usual way, and that its owner made a fine record as a teacher at the head of a private school in the lower part of our state.

Hunterdon

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H. E. DEATS,
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