

Jonas Bronck

By FREDERICK KUHL

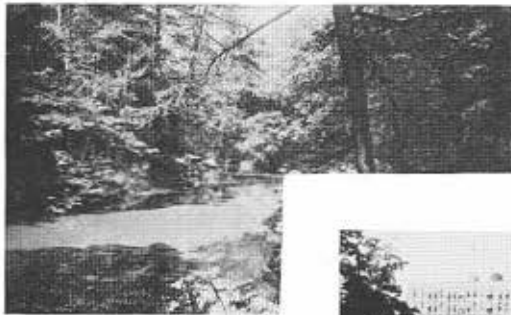
WHILE Jonas Bronck is generally regarded as the "Father of The Bronx," the early history of the borough is actually entwined in the lives of five colorful characters. These five, of which Jonas Bronck was one, were the first white settlers of the territory north of Manhattan Island. They were, in addition to Jonas Bronck, Anne Hutchinson, John Throckmorton, Thomas Cornell and Dr. Van der Donck.

The memory of these five pioneers is engraved in civic consciousness today through their association with historic landmarks of the borough. Not only in their character and lives is the history of The Bronx written but likewise in the settlements they left behind them. They represent not merely a group of courageous individuals, but a vital, fulsome period in American history. It is, therefore, only fitting and proper that they be memorialized in the Tercentenary of The Bronx in 1939.

First Settlement

Jonas Bronck, the first of the white settlers in the borough, arrived in Manhattan, then known as New Amsterdam, in July, 1639, aboard a Dutch vessel called "Fire of Troy". Some 13 years prior to his arrival, Manhattan Island had been purchased from the Indians for sixty guilders, valued today at 24 dollars. Bronck liked the new country and seeking a settlement of his own, negotiated a purchase with two Indian sachems, shortly after his arrival, for 500 acres north of Manhattan Island.

This area, described as "lying between the great kill" (Harlem River) and the Aquhunc River, afterwards known as the Bronx River after its



Although with different implements, the work of building The Bronx still goes on . . . a bit different from the methods of Jonas Bronck.



The second in a historical series of articles on The Bronx, relating to its approaching tercentenary.

purchaser, was called "Bronxland". To this wilderness, Jonas Bronck, with his family, retinue and cattle, came to establish a home. It was not a peaceful spot. Many hostile tribes roamed the area and even though Bronck's purchase had been made with two Indian chiefs, there was no guarantee against depredation.

Close to the present Harlem River Station of the branch road of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, at the mouth of the Bronx River, Jonas Bronck and his followers set to work to build the quarters in which they were to reside. According to historical records, the Bronck house was a stone building with a roof of tiles. It is believed that the tile roof had been constructed as a safeguard against flaming arrows of attacking Indians. In addition, he also built two barracks, a barn and tobacco house.

Peace Treaty Signed

From meager records of the first settlement, it appears that Jonas Bronck was a kindly man and that his reputation for honesty and fairness impressed the savages about him. At any rate, a guerilla war-

fare that had been waging between the Indians and the white men was settled in 1642 through the intervention of Jonas Bronck. The treaty of peace was signed in Bronck's house during that year. The differences of opinion, however, were never completely reconciled and the Indian attacks broke out again shortly thereafter. In 1643 Jonas Bronck died and the property was administered by his widow and son, Peter Bronck.

The origin of the guerilla warfare is important to the story of these five settlers, for all of them suffered through the succeeding events. In 1626, when Governor Minuit ruled New Amsterdam, several Indians came to trade beaver skins. They were met by servants of the Governor who not only stole the skins but killed one of the Indians. The escaped savage, a nephew of the man who was murdered, vowed vengeance. Some time later he appeared in Harlem with skins to trade with the white settlers. While the white man with whom he was bartering, stooped to examine the merchandise, the young Indian tomahawked the trader and escaped into Westchester.

Prompt satisfaction was demanded by the then Governor Kieft, but the sachems refused to surrender the murderer. A body of soldiers was thereafter despatched from New Amsterdam to bring the culprit back. Under orders, these soldiers attacked Indian villages and incensed the savages throughout the area, who, in turn, retaliated upon isolated settlers. It was then that the short-lived peace treaty was signed in Jonas Bronck's home.

Subsequently, Governor Kieft decided upon a war, placing Captain John Underhill in command of the Indian expedition. An intrepid Indian fighter, John Underhill must have been an interesting character. Writing of his experiences in America, Underhill made this observation in a letter to England, following one of his campaigns: "Myself received an arrow through my coat sleeve, a second against my helmet on the forehead; so as if God in his Providence had not moved the heart of my wife to carry it along with me, which I was unwilling to do, I had been slain. Give me leave to observe from hence, let no man despise advice and counsel of his wife, *though she be a woman.*"

Anne Hutchinson

One year before the death of Jonas Bronck, the second white settler of the borough appeared. This settler was a woman, one of the bravest and most courageous within the record of American history. Her name was Anne Hutchinson and she came to the wilderness of the upper stretches of The Bronx to escape the puritanical settlements of New England. Alone with her children and followers, her husband having died before her pilgrimage to Pelham, she settled near Split Rock.

Anne Hutchinson was an outcast from other new World settlements because of her religious ideals. From her refuge in the forest at Pelham, she continued to preach and the scattered settlers in the neighborhood frequently came to her prayer meetings. Among them was the Indian fighter, Captain John Underhill. Underhill had a great respect for this lone woman preacher and although she upbraided him frequently for his wild ways, he always returned for more. Some historical books even record the fact that Anne Hutchinson frequently made the Indian fighter sit in front of the others at a prayer meeting, with a long peaked "dunce" cap, so that he might be

An 1894 print of the historic Lorrillard Snuff Mills, from the private collection of J. Clarence Davies.



properly reminded of his sinful ways.

One night, while Captain Underhill sat musing in the tavern, drinking ale, the Indians swooped down on Anne Hutchinson's lonely settlement, slaughtered the cattle, burned the crops and houses, and killed the inmates.

The one survivor of the massacre was Anne Hutchinson's eight-year-old daughter, who was carried off into captivity. She was retaken after many years but by that time she had almost forgotten her native language and was decidedly unwilling to leave her captors.

When Underhill heard the news, he organized a punitive expedition and resolved vengeance. Following the Indians into Connecticut, he completely encircled their camp, making escape almost impossible. He then ordered a swift relentless attack and watched the progress of the slaughter from an overlooking knoll. When it was over, it is said, he gazed at the blood-stained snow, the ruins of the camp and at the bodies below and remarked, "If we had killed a thousand more of the red devils, it would not have paid for a single drop of Anne Hutchinson's blood!"

Throgg's Neck Settled

Both Anne Hutchinson and the Indian fighter, Captain Underhill are today memorialized in Bronx areas. The Hutchinson River and, more recently, the Hutchinson River Parkway, are both reminiscent of this brave, strange woman who built her life among the savagery of the forest glades. To Captain Underhill belongs the memorial signalized in the name of Underhill Avenue in the East Bronx.

Shortly after the appearance of Anne Hutchinson came another white settler, likewise in the year 1642. His name was John Throckmorton and with others he had se-

cured a license from the Dutch Government to settle within 12 miles of New Amsterdam. What was styled as a "land brief" was granted to "Jan Throckmorton" including "a piece of land containing as follows: Along the East River of New Netherlands, extending from the point half a mile, which said piece of land aforesaid on one side is bounded by a little river and on the other by a great kill, which river and kill, on high water running, meet each other, surrounding the land."

Clason Point

This locality, from the name of its original occupant, became known as "Throckmorton's Neck" soon shortened into "Throgg's Neck." It even appears as "Frog's Point" in some accounts. The "little river" referred to in the land brief, is known today as Westchester Creek and the so-called "great kill" is the Long Island Sound in the East River.

With Throckmorton came Thomas Cornell who founded Clason's Point. Both Throckmorton and Cornell had previously visited the area in company with Roger Williams with whom they had traveled from Rhode Island. The first settlement at Throgg's Neck was disrupted by hostile Indians who, according to an early account, "killed several persons belonging to the families of Throckmorton and Cornell." By the mediation of Roger Williams, however, this Indian outbreak was quelled. To this day, the area abounds in many historical mementoes, not the least interesting of which is the site of the old Willett house which General Howe used as his headquarters during the Revolution.

The last of the original white settlers of The Bronx is Dr. Adrian Van der Donck, a native of Holland. Some time in 1645, he settled a tract

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JONAS BRONCK

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from Spuyten Duyvil Creek north to a stream in Yonkers and extending eastward to the Bronx River. However, Van der Donck, whose lands became known as der Jonkheer's Landt from which the name Yonkers was derived, settled finally in the level marshes above Kings Bridge, where he could build himself a true Dutch farm. He was liked by the Indians and was even granted a considerable parcel of land by one of the Sachems as a gift.

Whales in Hudson

Before he died in 1655, he wrote a book pertaining to the character of the land. Some idea of the vastness of The Bronx in those days can be gleaned from his pages. According to one historian, he described the country as a land where "buffaloes are tolerable plenty."

In March, 1647, according to this account, "whales swam up the Hudson River for a distance of forty (Dutch) miles from which place one of them returned and stranded about twelve miles from the sea, near which place four others also stranded the same year. In the interior there are animals of the size of horses with cloven hoofs and one horn in the forehead, so fleet and strong that they are seldom seen or caught. Deer are incredibly numerous."

Resettlement

After Van der Donck's death, the Indian wars broke out again and the settlers of The Bronx sought refuge behind the forts of New Amsterdam. That was a bloody period marked with ferocious fighting and relentless killings on both sides and neither women nor children were spared. But peace came once again and the early settlers of The Bronx returned to take up the work in which they had been interrupted. That period is another story in itself, deserving equally a place in the memory of the nation.

The Bronx Board of Trade Endorses Better Health Week Set for April 26

The Bronx Board of Trade this week endorsed the movement for improved health conditions in the borough, to be signalized in the "Bronx Better Health Week" proclaimed by Borough President James J. Lyons for the last week in April. Special exhibits are to be held in the Bronx County Court House during observance of the event which will be open to the public free of charge daily from 9:00 a. m. to 11:00 p. m.

Civic Groups Participate

Bronx Better Health Week is officially held under the auspices of a group of local health associations, all of whom are cooperating in the presentation of exhibits. These are, The Bronx County Medical Society, The Bronx County Dental Society, The Northern Dental Society, Bronx County Pharmaceutical Association, Bronx Tuberculosis and Health Committee and the Department of Health of the City of New York.

Many Exhibitors

Exhibitors who will have interesting displays and literature covering all phases of health work in the borough include, in addition to those listed above: Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, American Red Cross,

Board of Education—Bureau of Child Guidance, Bronx Hospital, Bronx Pediatric Society, Bronx County Optometric Society, Children's Welfare Federation.

Others are: Department of Sanitation, City of New York, Maternity Center Association, Montefiore Hospital, National Safety Council, New York City Cancer Committee, New York Diabetes Association, New York League for the Hard of Hearing, New York State Dept. of Social Welfare—Div. of the Blind, New York Tuberculosis and Health Association, Podiatry Society, United Hospital Fund, Visiting Nurse Service, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association.

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