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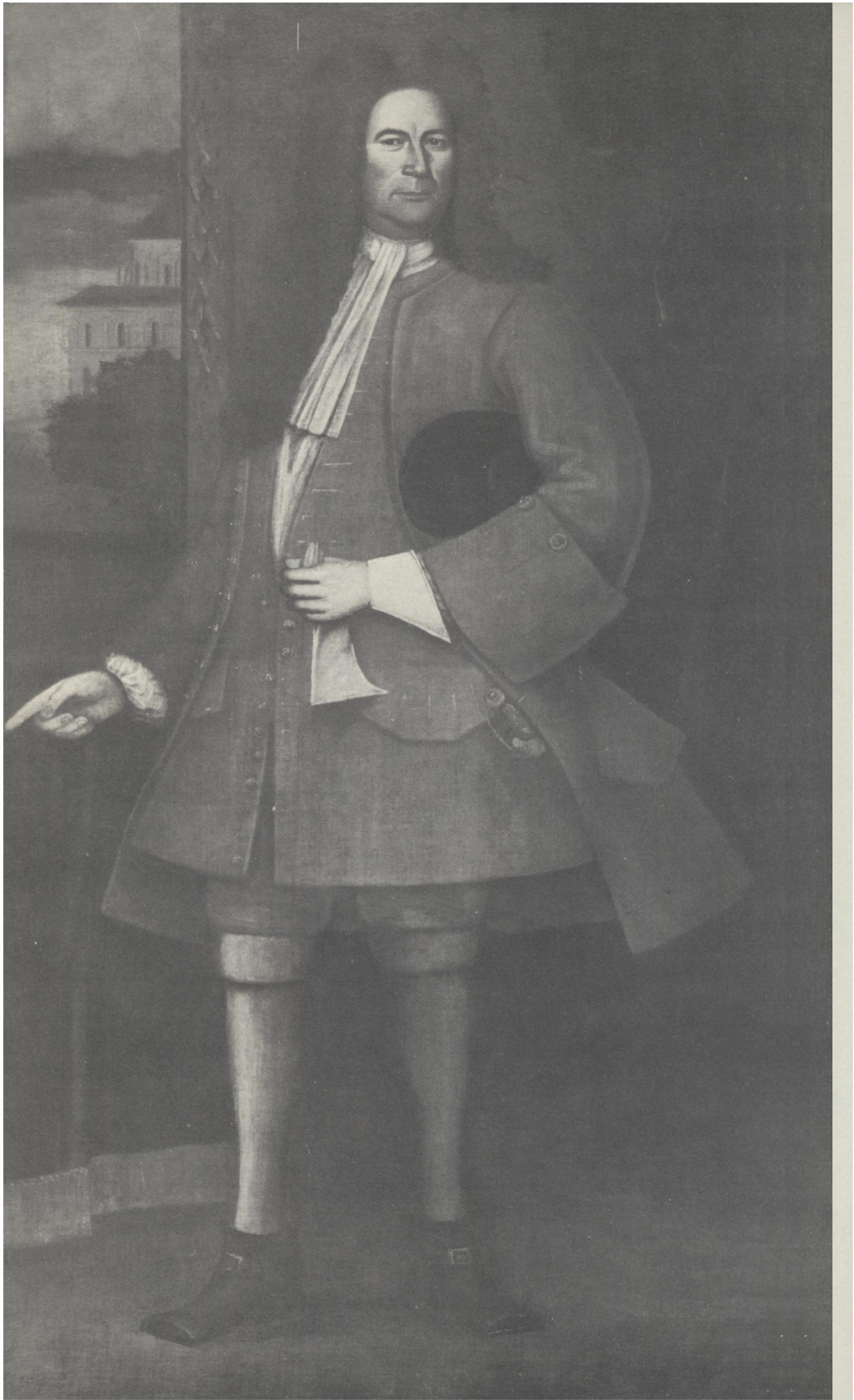
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Dutch Patricians in Colonial Albany

by
ALICE P. KENNEY

THE HISTORY of Albany, New York, offers a remarkable case study of the social development of a non-British ethnic group within the framework of British rule in the Thirteen Colonies. Founded in 1624 by the Dutch, Albany was conquered by the English with the rest of New Netherland in 1664. In 1686 Governor Thomas Dongan transformed its system of government into that of an English town by the grant of a city charter, but for the next three generations the Albanians continued to speak the Dutch language, observe Dutch customs, and exercise their English civic liberties in a Dutch manner. This Dutch tradition was a heritage from perhaps two hundred families of seventeenth-century Dutch settlers from whom most of the early eighteenth-century Albanians were descended. A few English immigrants came as soldiers in the garrison of the city's little fort or as officials appointed by the governor. They married daughters of Dutch families and usually acted with their in-laws in local affairs. Occasionally one of them was elected to local office. In spite of their English names, their descendants were completely absorbed into the Dutch society of Albany.¹

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¹ There were 400 people, over half of them probably children, in Beverwyck in 1657. Not until the census of 1714, when there were 1,136 inhabitants in the city, do the figures again distinguish between the city and the county. Evarts Boutell Greene and Virginia L. Harrington, *American Population Before the Federal Census of 1790* (New York, 1932), pp. 102-04. Furthermore, many 17th century Albanians were transient traders who did not found families there. The stockade assessment of 1679 lists 143 householders, many of whom left no descendants in Albany and some of whom cannot now even be identified with certainty. Arnold Johan Ferdinand Van Laer, trans., *Minutes of the Court of Albany, Schenectady and Colony Rensselaerswyck*, 3 vols. (Albany, 1926-32), II, 396-7; Jonathan Pearson, "Contributions for the Genealogies of the First Settlers of the Ancient County of Albany," in Joel Munsell, ed., *Collections on the History of Albany*, 4 vols. (Albany, 1865-72), IV *passim*.

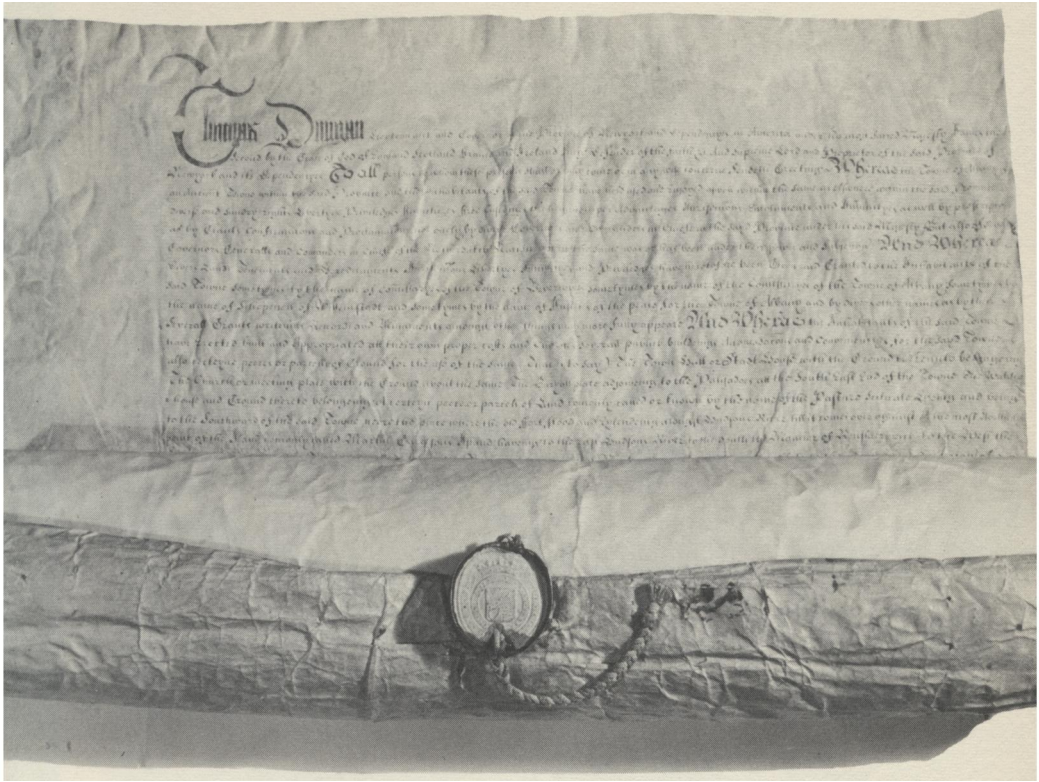


Pieter Schuyler (1657-1724). [Albany Institute of History and Art.]



Thomas Dongan. [From Reynolds, Albany Chronicles.]

After the English conquest these colonists of Dutch descent and American birth were cut off almost entirely from direct contact with the homeland of their ancestors. Nevertheless, the society they developed in eighteenth-century Albany resembled that of towns in the mediaeval Netherlands far more than it resembled that of any English settlements in North America. Indeed the history of Dutch Albany recapitulated with startling fidelity the process by which Henri Pirenne believed towns originated in the Netherlands. In *Early Democracies in the Low Countries*, Pirenne described how, early in the Middle Ages, groups of traders congregated at geographical locations which possessed natural facilities for trade and also some means of defense. Eventually the merchants huddled around a *burg*, or fortress, surrounded their *poort*, or suburb, with walls which isolated it from the surrounding countryside. Then they undertook responsibility for their own defense. In order to protect themselves from internal turmoil and external interference and to engage in commerce with other towns, they needed to be free of the personal services and military and



Albany City Charter of July 22, 1686. [City of Albany. Courtesy of Albany Institute of History and Art.]

monetary obligations exacted by neighboring feudal lords. The towns therefore appealed directly to the overlords of these lords. The overlords granted the towns charters of commercial and political privileges for which the burghers were willing to pay generously. Such charters usually confirmed the town's existing liberties and sometimes granted one or two new ones at a time, so that the building up of a town's traditional body of liberties was a continuing process extending over several generations and even over several hundred years.²

Every town's liberties were therefore different from those of every other town, but in the course of the Middle Ages towns in the Low Countries developed very similar forms of local government. Every town had a town council appointed by the lord. Gradually, however, the burghers on the councils acquired the right of nominating their successors. In the early Middle Ages they held their offices for life, but in the thir-

² Henri Pirenne, *Early Democracies in the Low Countries*, ed. John H. Mundy (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), Ch. 1-3.

teenth century the cities of Flanders one by one insisted that they be appointed for one year only. Thus annual co-optation by the existing council and the lord—never election by the community or any part of it—became the traditional means of selection of civic officials in Dutch towns. In the early Middle Ages, wealthy merchants controlled the town councils and handed down their offices from father to son. Eventually most of these families retired from active commerce and lived on their invested fortunes, devoting their efforts to scholarship, the professions or public service. Such domination of a city by a few families is called “patrician.” Of this patrician tradition in the seventeenth century, after the Dutch revolt against Spain and at the time of the Dutch settlement of Albany, Pirenne observed:

. . . [the] government corresponded to causes deeply seated in the essential tendencies of Netherlandish social life . . . order was ultimately everywhere restored in the interest of the wealthy commercial class. Moreover, violent measures were not required to effect this result . . . the administration of the towns was left to the magistrates and the ancient political prerogatives of the craft guilds were to fall into disuse . . . the population of the towns was deprived of all power of interference in local affairs. The council, “the law” of the town, recruited from among quite a small number of rich families, monopolized the policing and the jurisdiction of the municipality. An aristocratic spirit, enjoining obedience to authority, took the place of the democratic spirit . . . demonstrations . . . came to an end after the first third of the seventeenth century.³

The history of colonial Albany follows this pattern, although it was compressed into a century and a half instead of being spread over several hundred years. But we must not visualize the Albany Dutch as consciously and deliberately reproducing a historical development. They were not historians, nor indeed were they educated at all beyond the degree of literacy necessary to read the Bible and keep accounts, and the degree of skill necessary to work effectively at their trades. Nor were they members of patrician families with an unwritten tradition of community leadership. They were traders, artisans and farmers accustomed to obey their government rather than to participate in it. But these ordinary

³ *Ibid.*, Ch. 4; p. 235-36.

Dutchmen, like all settlers on the American frontier, found themselves obliged to make for themselves many everyday decisions which in their homelands were made by the elders of families, by ecclesiastical or secular authorities, or by long established custom. In making such decisions, all colonists had to fall back upon the unwritten, and surely very largely unspoken, traditions, values, and habits of behavior instilled in them in childhood by their parents and in youth by their general experience of community living. Among the Albany Dutch these fundamental bases for decision-making were channelled and reinforced by being communicated in the Dutch language, which was generally spoken in the city until the American Revolution and continued to be used in isolated rural areas nearby until the end of the nineteenth century. In this respect the Albanians differed greatly from their countrymen in New York, whose location at the seat of British government and in a major seaport prompted them, in a single generation after the conquest, to learn English and to develop a cosmopolitan culture.⁴

The colonial history of Albany began in 1624, when the Dutch West India Company built a post called Fort Orange at the head of salt-water navigation on the Hudson River. It consisted of a stockade to defend the persons and goods of traders buying furs from the Indians and of a few families sent to grow food for the traders. Then the Company offered to give vast tracts of land and the title of "Patroon" to anyone who would undertake to found agricultural colonies. A wealthy director of the Company named Kiliaen Van Rensselaer selected the land around Fort Orange, now the entirety of Albany and Rensselaer Counties, and sent his first settlers in 1630. The conditions by which Van Rensselaer held his land from the company and on which he and his descendants let it out to tenants were a curious composite of mediaeval legal terminology and early modern Dutch tenurial practice. Without trying to indicate that the Van Rensselaer tenure was feudal, which S. G. Nissenson has conclusively demonstrated

⁴ Perhaps it should be emphasized that by "recapitulation" I do not mean the environmental determinism which Lee Benson identifies as one of Frederick J. Turner's appropriations from the system of Achille Loria. [Lee Benson, *Turner and Beard* (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), pp. 28-29.] I mean rather that human beings conditioned in a continuing tradition often react in similar ways to similar circumstances although they may be totally unacquainted with each other and widely separated in time or space.

not to be so, it may be enlightening to suggest that the relationship between the Van Rensselaers and the traders at Fort Orange was analogous to the relationship between feudal lords and burghers in the Netherlands when towns originated there.⁵

The Van Rensselaers insisted that Fort Orange was included in their original grant, but not until 1648 did they try to control it directly. In that year Brant Van Slichtenhorst, the Van Rensselaers' domineering agent, prompted the Patroon's settlers to move from the east side of the Hudson to the west side and to build new homes under the guns of the fort. Although Van Slichtenhorst insisted that the purpose of the removal was defense, Pieter Stuyvesant, the Company's governor, believed that he really intended to seize control of the Indian trade for the Patroon. When Stuyvesant visited Fort Orange in April 1652, he discovered that not only the Company's settlers but also many of the Van Rensselaers' own colonists were at odds with the Patroon's agent. Like a mediaeval Dutch overlord, "at the request of the traders living within and immediately without the fort," Stuyvesant ordered that the fort and the settled area around it should be a municipality called Beverwyck with a court of its own, independent of the Van Rensselaers. He laid out the land in the town in generous lots which he granted to the various inhabitants. Then, to make sure that Van Slichtenhorst would not interfere, he arrested him and shipped him back to the Netherlands.⁶

Like towns in the Netherlands, Beverwyck was governed by a town council. Stuyvesant appointed six magistrates, whose duties were to carry out his orders, to make and enforce local ordinances, and to render justice among the inhabitants. Their terms ran for two years. Every spring the magistrates nominated a double slate from which the governor filled the three vacancies created by expiring terms. In 1657 a formal legal distinction was made between "great burghers," who paid fifty

⁵ S. G. Nissenson, *The Patroon's Domain* (New York, 1937), pp. 16-17, 24-27, 33-68.

⁶ *Ibid.* 201-234; A. J. F. Van Laer, trans., *Minutes of the Court of Fort Orange and Beverwyck*, 2 vols. (Albany, 1920-23), I, 15.

The very name of Beverwyck indicates the tradition that Stuyvesant and the burghers were following, for *Wik* (*wyck*) was a common northern European word for the mercantile district surrounding a fort. John H. Mundy and Peter Riesenbergh, *Mediaeval Town* (Princeton, N.J., 1958), pp. 46-47. *Bever*, of course, referred to the commodity in which this particular *wyck* traded almost exclusively.



Fort Frederick, built in 1676 at the head of State Street to replace Fort Orange, which had become decadent. [From Reynolds, Albany Chronicles.]

guilders for the privileges of holding office and of exemption from confiscation and attainder in capital offenses, and “small burghers” who paid twenty guilders for the liberty to do business in the town. Both of these “rights” passed by inheritance to the male descendants of their original holders. These venerable institutions were of course reduced to the simplest terms. The men who became “great burghers” were leading householders and principal traders in Beverwyck, but it is unlikely that any of them had ever participated in town government in the Netherlands. They held their court without lawbooks or lawyers, heard arguments which consisted mostly of factual testimony, and decided cases on the basis of common sense and their own or the governor’s ordinances. They never introduced the formal complexities of Roman-Dutch legal procedure in Beverwyck at all.⁷

When the English conquered the province in 1664, they made no material changes in this system beyond renaming the town Albany in honor of the Duke of York and Albany, later King James II. The magistrates continued to hold their court, issue ordinances regulating abuses of the fur trade, and punish offenses against them. They kept their records in Dutch. Every spring they sent the usual double slate of nominees to the English governor, who filled the vacancies as Stuyvesant had done. After the reconquest in 1674, gradual changes were made. Jury trials were introduced for important causes, the nomenclature of justices and courts was altered, and penalties were sometimes stated in sterling values, al-

⁷ *Fort Orange Minutes*, I, 15; Nissenson, p. 133; A. J. Weise, *History of the City of Albany, New York* (Albany, 1884), p. 189; Albert E. McKinley, “English and Dutch Towns of New Netherland,” *American Historical Review*, VI (1900-01), pp. 1-18.

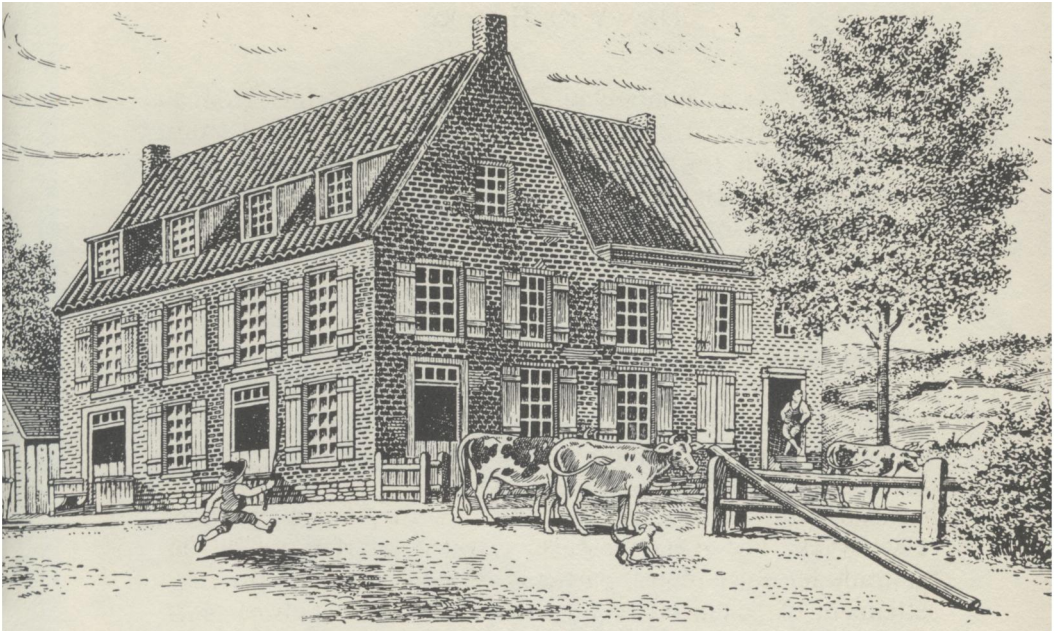
though they were undoubtedly paid in commodities. After 1676, when Governor Edmund Andros moved the fort from the center of the town to the hill behind it, the burghers were responsible for building and maintaining their own stockade.⁸

In 1686, the form of government of Albany was drastically altered by the Dongan Charter. But this change was not imposed by the conqueror. It was granted by the governor at the request of leading Albanians who, like their mediaeval precursors, wanted their privileges confirmed by higher authority. Like these precursors, they feared the encroachment of neighboring feudal lords, in this case the Van Rensselaers, whose determined effort to acquire from the King of England all the privileges which Stuyvesant had denied them and a few more had recently won them a new patent for the Manor of Rensselaerswyck. The Albanians also resented interference in the fur trade by other towns, particularly New York and the new settlement of Schenectady which had sprung up between Albany and the Indian country. For this confirmation of priv-

⁸ *Albany Minutes*, I, 203-4; III, p. 448. William Smith, *History of the Late Province of New York* (New York, 1928), pp. 126-7. Albert E. McKinley, "Transition from Dutch to English Rule in New York," *American Historical Review*, VI (1901), pp. 693-724.



Sir Edmund Andros. [From Winsor, Narrative and Critical History of America III.]



The Schuyler house at State Street and the common lane (South Pearl) which led to meadows outside the city. [Morris Gerber Collection.]

ileges they were willing to pay generously. Governor Dongan later acknowledged receiving £300, which the Albany magistrates recouped by selling some of the city's lands.⁹

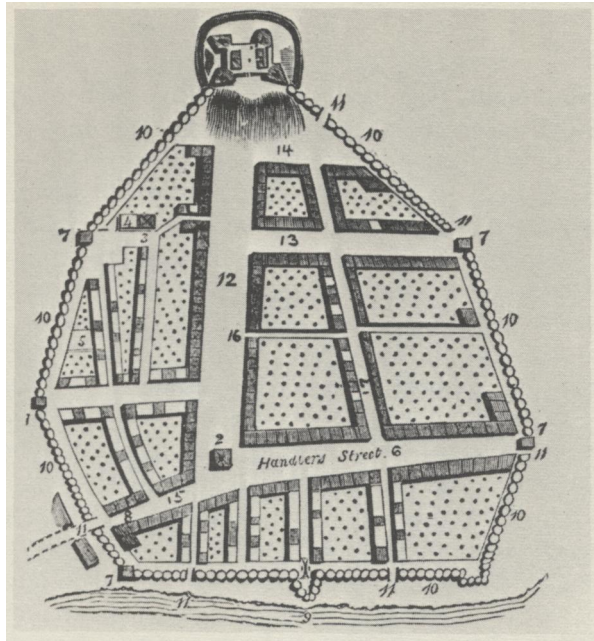
The Dongan Charter introduced the Albanians to English customs of town government at least as venerable as the Dutch customs with which they were familiar. First it gave the city title to all the land within much larger limits than those of Beverwyck. Stuyvesant had granted the burghers the land within cannon shot—150 Rhineland morgens or about 1,850 English feet—of the fort. Within these limits they had built their homes; around them they eventually built a stockade like the walls which surrounded Dutch towns. Town and country were sharply distinguished and no one engaged in agriculture within the town limits, although many inhabitants had room on their lots for gardens and most of them, like mediaeval European townsmen, kept livestock which the town herdsman

⁹ Nissenson, pp. 276-303; Lawrence H. Leder, *Robert Livingston and the Politics of Colonial New York* (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. 44-45. Gov. Thomas Dongan to the Privy Council, Feb. 22, 1687, Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, 1853-57), III, 411; Albany Common Council, Minutes, Oct. 26, 1686, New York State Library, Albany, N. Y.

drove daily to a common pasture. By contrast, the Dongan Charter endowed Albany generously with land, in the English tradition which considered a borough the center of an agricultural district as well as a mercantile entrepot and a fortress. The city limits now ran a mile along the river front and sixteen miles back into the wilderness. Most of this land was barren pine plains and remained sparsely settled from that day until the present, when it has become desirable for suburban development, but the Albany Dutch did not want it for agricultural purposes. What they wanted was the road to their trading competitor Schenectady which ran through it and, until Schenectady protested and the boundaries were altered, Schenectady itself.¹⁰

The charter further provided that Albany was to be ruled by a mayor, six aldermen and six assistants. All of these officials, their duties, and the method of their selection were customary in England but unknown in the Netherlands. The office of mayor, like the title, originated in French towns, but was introduced into England about 1200 and spread rapidly there. Mayors in England were from the beginning elected by their boroughs, although the king might disallow the election. The title of alderman was used from Anglo-Saxon times for various local officials, often with judicial functions. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it came to denote the members of English town councils, one of whose principal duties was to administer local justice. There were usually twelve or twenty-four aldermen, elected by geographical districts called wards. The franchise by which they were elected varied from town to town; sometimes it was very limited indeed. In some English towns where this was the case, the disfranchised protested until they were granted permission to elect a "common council" of "assistants" which advised the mayor and aldermen. The mayor of Albany was not elected but appointed by the governor, and the recorder and clerk (who were officers of the King's courts) by the King himself. Two aldermen and two assistants from each of three wards were elected by the "inhabitants." This term, unusual in English town charters

¹⁰ "Charter of the City of Albany," in Joel Munsell, ed., *Annals of Albany*, 10 vols., (Albany, 1850-60), II, 61-87; Nissenson, p. 232; Jonathan Pearson, trans., *Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck*, 4 vols. (Albany, 1865, 1916-19), II, 431; Frederick W. Maitland, *Selected Historical Essays* (Boston, 1957), "Township and Borough," pp. 3-16.



Albany map of 1695, showing Fort Frederick on the west (top), the Hudson on the east, Steuben Street on the north, Hudson Avenue on the south. [From Reynolds, Albany Chronicles.]

until the mid-seventeenth-century, implied at that time and later the possession of freehold property in the town. But the charter also retained the familiar distinction between “great burghers” and “small burghers,” for merchants had to pay a fee of £3 to be admitted to civic privileges, while artisans paid only 36 shillings.¹¹

The tradition of officials elected by the citizens in English towns had evolved from the eagerly-sought and jealously-guarded privilege of “farming” the king’s revenue—that is, of apportioning and collecting the money required by the king within the town, without the interference of the king’s sheriff. It was very early recognized that citizens would be much more willing to co-operate with officials of their own selection. In the Netherlands, where there was no king, this custom never developed. To the Albany Dutch, therefore, the word “elec-

¹¹ James Tait, *Mediaeval English Borough* (Manchester, Eng., 1936), Mayor, pp. 190, 255, 190-96; Aldermen, pp. 63, 229, 248, 281, 322; Assistants, pp. 247, 324; Elections, pp. 241-2. For an example of these institutions in a particular English town see J. W. F. Hill, *Mediaeval Lincoln* (Cambridge, Eng., 1948), pp. 195, 206-07, 277, 293.

tion" undoubtedly signified far more the power by which godly Calvinists ruled the unregenerate than the power by which citizens selected officials to help them rule themselves. Nevertheless, they soon learned to use their new governmental machinery after their own fashion. We know very little about how they conducted their elections, but we do know whom they elected to the Common Council between 1686 and 1776. An analysis of these 250 names from 91 families shows that one-fifth of them came from four families, Schuyler, Lansing, Roseboom and Wendel. Another fifth came from seven more families. Of their wives—243 women from 100 families—one-fifth came from five families, Schuyler, Cuyler, Ten Broeck, Wendel and Lansing and one-tenth from four more families. During the ninety years of colonial charter government the ten families included in the following table led all the rest by far, both in number of members and in number of terms served. Evidently they considered themselves, and were considered by their neighbors, to be the natural leaders of the community. Although they entered civic office by election rather than co-optation, they may fairly be considered a group of patrician families analagous to those of cities in the Netherlands.¹²

PATRICIAN FAMILIES ON THE ALBANY COMMON COUNCIL,
1686-1776

FAMILY	Number of Members	Terms Alderman	Terms Assistant	Terms Mayor and Recorder	Wives of Councilors
Bleecker	9	22	30	11	4
Cuyler	8	38	12	26	11
Hansen	5	32	12	4	—
Lansing	15	31	36	—	10
Roseboom	13	41	37	3	6
Schuyler	15	35	9	16	12
Ten Broeck	7	33	21	30	11
Ten Eyck	8	24	17	17	4
Van Schaick	8	20	5	11	10
Wendel	10	15	20	—	10

¹² Tait, 295. Both the table and the analysis are based on the Common Council election lists in the Minutes, Sep. 29, 1686-1776, Vols. II-IX. Information about the wives is from Pearson, "Genealogies," *passim*, in Munsell Collections IV.

These Albany patricians dominated the city socially as well as politically, in which respect they further resembled Pirenne's patricians in the Netherlands. Pirenne pointed out that originally townsmen had possessed social equality in that they all claimed to be free men, as opposed to serfs, and it was practically impossible for a lord to prove the contrary in any particular instance.

The first inhabitants of the growing towns were not obliged to vindicate their claim to freedom. In virtue of the social conditions of the period it came to them of itself and without any formality. Not till much later did it become their right. It began by being a bare fact . . . Freedom, which had become so rare in the course of the 11th century that the word free was a synonym for noble, was thenceforth the legal status of the burgher. There might be, and there were striking social contrasts among the burghers. But there no longer existed differences in the eye of the law. The poorest artisan and the richest merchant were alike inhabitants of the town and alike free.¹³

But very soon some burghers amassed more wealth than others. They began to play a conspicuous role in civic affairs, both as public officials and as private benefactors.

Little by little the homogeneous body of *mercatores* split into classes, more and more distinct from each other as economic activity increased . . . No conscious effort was required to produce this result: equality disappeared of itself, obeying the same law of evolution as the economic community to which it owed its existence. . . . By force of circumstances power passed insensibly into the hands of the wealthiest . . . The great burghers of the Middle Ages emerged slowly from the mass of the people, and their political supremacy was based solely on the strength of their economic position . . . the great majority of patricians are only merchants who have become wealthy . . . No protest was raised against this ascendancy of the patricians. The commons recognized them as lords of the towns . . . Little by little the class which possessed the wealth, gave the impulse to the manufactures of the town, and had, besides, at its disposal, the leisure necessary for taking part in public affairs, monopolized the whole municipal administration . . . The government, to which the towns were subjected, was, in the fullest sense of the term, a class government.¹⁴

¹³ Pirenne, pp. 14, 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 109-10, 115.

The Dutch patricians considered their most precious communal possession to be privilege rather than liberty as we understand it, but it should be re-emphasized that when the patrician tradition originated, liberty in any form—even the personal liberty that we believe to be the inalienable birthright of mankind—was itself a privilege granted by a higher authority in return for a substantial payment in moveable goods. It was therefore perfectly reasonable to early Dutch burghers that those who were able to contribute most to the acquisition and maintenance of these privileges should be responsible for determining how the community would exercise them. Furthermore, for a long time civic policies which pro-

Evert Wendell. Oil on canvas by unknown painter, 1718. [Albany Institute of History and Art.]





Elsje Wendell Schuyler. Oil on panel by unknown painter, ca. 1720. [Albany Institute of History and Art.]

moted the commercial interests of the patricians did in fact also promote the general prosperity of the towns. Pirenne summarized their accomplishments:

From the middle of the 12th century till the end of the 13th, it presents a wonderful spectacle of intelligence, unwearied activity and capacity for affairs. It devoted itself to the public welfare with a wholeheartedness that commands respect. It may be truly affirmed that, under its government, the civilization of the cities acquired the principal characteristics which were to distinguish it to the end. It devised the whole machine of municipal administration, which survived untouched the democratic revolution of the 14th century, when the patriciate itself

was overthrown. It gave their final form to the various public services of the commonwealth. The most important of all, the financial system, was its peculiar work and bears high testimony to its abilities . . . They found means to surround the town with strong walls, to undertake the paving of the streets, to bring drinking water from neighbouring springs, to construct warehouses, wharves, locks, bridges and all the equipment necessary for commerce. For commercial prosperity was evidently their first care.¹⁵

In pursuit of this prosperity they avidly sought one form of privilege which we would by no means consider a liberty—monopolies in the production or distribution of some commodity. Sometimes Netherlandish towns even fought wars with neighboring towns to enforce or extend such monopolies.

Eventually the non-patrician elements in many Dutch towns became dissatisfied with patrician domination. Artisans organized in craft guilds forced the patricians to admit their representatives to the town councils. They then formed in effect a “plebian” group quite as anxious to defend their newly-won privileges against all comers as the patricians had ever been. When the Dukes of Burgundy tried to trim down the privileges of the towns from above in the fifteenth century, and when enthusiastic proletarians tried to put the social doctrines of the Reformation into effect from below in the sixteenth, patricians and plebians thrust their differences behind them and united in defense of the privileges of the towns. In the southern Netherlands their resistance was crushed by Spanish troops. In the northern Netherlands they were successful in maintaining their liberty. But when they had achieved national independence the patricians of the northern Netherlands cities discovered that they could no longer exercise their privileges without reference to the privileges of each other.

A system based on the nation as a whole took the place of a system based on the interests of the towns. The patrician magistrates were nominated by the central power which, moreover controlled all departments of municipal administration . . . If the towns were no longer absolute autocrats of the economic destinies of the Netherlands, they still had considerable power to influence them . . . The wealthy burghers thus became men of affairs, manufacturers, speculators, whose complex interests were entwined

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Ch. 5; pp. 119-20, 168.

with the whole national life and ceased to be restricted to the narrow circle of the commune. And what is true of its economic aspect is true also of its political life. The rich merchant classes supplied the personnel of the administration and sat in the assemblies of the state . . . In the Middle Ages each town constituted an independent political and economic whole and its government could be overthrown by a mere local revolution. To do away with the patrician government in the 17th century, nothing less than an upheaval of the whole state was required, for the state had absorbed the towns.¹⁶

The social development of the Albany patriciate followed this Pirennean pattern. Most of the earliest Albanians participated one way or another in the fur trade, though some also practiced crafts. By far the wealthiest traders in Beverwyck were Philip and David Schuyler and Goosen Gerritse Van Schaick. Philip Schuyler's son Pieter Schuyler, who gained overwhelming influence among the Iroquois and led the group of traders who procured the Dongan Charter, was named Mayor of Albany by that instrument. His sister Alida's husband Robert Livingston, a bilingual Scots immigrant who had assimilated himself in Albany, was appointed City Clerk. Levinus Van Schaick, a son of Goosen Gerritse and a brother of Pieter Schuyler's wife, became an alderman. Dirck Wesselse [Ten Broeck], another trader closely associated commercially with Schuyler and Livingston, was appointed Recorder. The descendants and in-laws of these three families, who frequently intermarried with each other, formed the core of the Albany patriciate. Their main civic interest, once the charter was secured, was to exercise the monopoly of the Indian trade included in it to their own advantage.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Ch. 6-10; pp. 237-8.

Albany's first seal, which was used till 1752. [From Reynolds, Albany Chronicles.]



Not all the Albany fur traders were associated with Schuyler's group. Johannes Cuyler, Johannes Wendell and Hans Hendrickse [Hansen] competed with it. They resented the charter because the Schuyler group, in city office, could manipulate the monopoly to interfere with their trade. These men had family ties with the group of New York City residents who responded to the overthrow of King James II in 1689 by overthrowing the government of the province of New York, under the leadership of Jacob Leisler. In October 1689 Leisler sent a military expedition from New York to Albany. It was admitted to the town by the burghers, including not only the disgruntled traders but also disappointed artisans, whose interests had hardly been considered in the charter, and dissatisfied Lutherans resenting persecution by the Dutch Reformed minister and his flock. Mayor Schuyler retired to the King's fort with a few followers. The Leislerians prepared to attack the fort, but desisted when Mohawk Indians friendly to Schuyler threatened to intervene. The French and Indian massacre at Schenectady in February 1690 forced the Albany magistrates to co-operate grudgingly with Leisler for the common defense, but their indispensable friendship with the Mohawks prevented him from displacing them altogether.¹⁷

After Leisler's overthrow by royal troops in 1691 the Albany Leislerians, like those elsewhere in the province, were for awhile in disgrace. In 1695, however, Mayor Schuyler's youngest brother Johannes married Elizabeth Staats Wendel, the widow of Johannes Wendel and a sister of leading Leislerians in both Albany and New York.¹⁸ In the years that followed, members of the Leislerian fur-trading families began to be elected to the Common Council, and there were numerous marriages between younger members of the families which had opposed each other in 1689. Thus both groups of fur-traders merged into a single patriciate, which agreed that it and no one else should rule the city although individuals and families within it often engaged in personal disagreements and commercial rivalries. The heyday of these fur-trading patricians came between 1710 and 1721. In no year of that decade

¹⁷ Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, *Documentary History of the State of New York*, 4 vols. (Albany, 1849-51), II, 109-32; Jerome R. Reich, *Leisler's Rebellion* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 89-91; Leder, Ch. 4.

¹⁸ Her brother Jochem Staats was one of the first Albanians to declare for Leisler. Another brother, Dr. Samuel Staats, was a leading Leislerian in New York but returned to the Netherlands after Leisler's downfall. Pearson, "Genealogies," p. 184.

did they fail to have a majority on the Common Council and in two years, 1716 and 1717, they controlled eleven out of the twelve seats. Their strength fell off during the 1720's and dropped to a minority after 1730.¹⁹

The main concern of the united patricians was still exercising the city's monopoly of the fur trade and of Indian relations. About the time that the Dongan Charter was issued, the Albany traders made far-reaching plans to divert the Great Lakes fur trade from the St. Lawrence Valley to the Hudson Valley. These designs came to nothing when war broke out with France in 1689. That war lasted for nine years. It was accompanied by a general conflict among the Indians which decimated the tribes and showed both the Albanians and the Canadians how dangerous such warfare might become. The Indians themselves were anxious for peace. Therefore in 1701, when the War of the Spanish Succession broke out, Albany aldermen David Schuyler and Wessel Ten Broeck reported to the Common Council that on a business trip to Montreal they had been approached by French officials who indicated that they saw no reason why hostilities in Europe had to be extended to America. The Canadians wanted the Albanians to restrain the Iroquois from raiding and to continue selling French traders the cheaper and better English manufactured goods which the Indians preferred. It was quite in the Albanians' Dutch tradition to profit by commerce with their putative enemies; in fact, the Dutch war for independence from Spain had been largely financed by Dutch trade with Spanish possessions. Now the Albanians were quite willing to disregard both French and English trade regulations and sell to anyone who would give them good merchantable beavers in exchange.²⁰

The principal attack on the Albany monopoly came from traders outside of Albany, particularly in Schenectady. Finally a Schenectady trader named Johannis Myndertse challenged it successfully in the courts. In 1720, furthermore, Governor William Burnet prompted the Assembly to pass a law taxing

¹⁹ This analysis would indicate the inaccuracy of Reich's somewhat obscure statement that the Albanians threw off control of their local oligarchy during Bellomont's administration. Reich, p. 154.

²⁰ David A. Armour, "Merchants of Albany, New York: 1686-1760" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern U., 1965), pp. 84-88, 111-116; Albany Common Council Minutes, May 5, 1701; Charles R. Boxer, *Dutch Seaborne Empire* (New York, 1965), p. 21.

the Montreal trade out of existence. It was at this time that Albany's representatives first participated conspicuously in the Assembly, siding with the opponents of the law. After it was passed the Albanians ignored it and supported efforts to persuade the Board of Trade to disallow it, which was eventually done. In 1724, Burnet built a new post at Oswego, which quickly became the center of English trade with the Great Lakes Indians. Albany traders flocked there, but they could not prevent other traders from going there as well. Therefore, after the 1720's, the fur trade moved away from Albany. A few Albany families, notably the Cuylers, remained in it, but most of them turned to more profitable concerns.²¹

Importing merchants began to be important in Albany in the 1720's. The population in the rural areas of the Hudson Valley was increasing steadily, mostly in the course of nature rather than by immigration. These farm families grew wheat, which some people believed to be the finest in the world, and which West Indian planters bought to feed their slaves. In return the Albany merchants' agents accepted rum, sugar, hard money, and bills of exchange. The Albany merchants then used these commodities and credits to pay merchants in London for comforts and luxuries such as tea from India and for manufactured goods such as tools and textiles, which the farm families needed and none of which were then manufactured in the province of New York. Pirenne described a similar interdependence of town and countryside in the Netherlands:

The burghers . . . had no claim to the produce of the soil. To get possession of such produce, they had to buy it, or perhaps we should say, to exchange for it the commodities which they manufactured. Instead of being economically independent, their lives were perpetually dependent on the help of the peasants and the landed proprietors of the neighborhood. . . . The country folk, on the other hand, of their own accord and by the mere force of economic circumstances, brought their commodities to the neighboring town for sale. . . . Henceforth the peasant also became buyer and seller . . . he sowed and cultivated more land, sure always of finding a buyer for the crops which he raised from the soil. . . . His lot improved rapidly.²²

Some of these new Albany merchants were sons of fur-

²¹ Armour, Ch. VI, VII. I am indebted to Mr. Armour for further information on this subject by private correspondence.

²² *Ibid.*, Ch. VIII; Pirenne, pp. 78-79.

trading patricians. Others were sons of artisans, ambitious to become patricians if they possibly could. Some of them recognized an opportunity after an incident in 1730 when Governor William Cosby granted one of his personal friends a tract of land to which the city of Albany had a claim. The Common Council protested. Cosby retaliated by appointing as Mayor Edward Holland, an Englishman, a long-time resident of the city and former alderman, but not related by blood or marriage to the patrician families. During Holland's mayoralty a number of men from the rising merchant families were elected to the Common Council. To them, Cosby offered shares in some of his other extravagant land grants and so divided and silenced the city's opposition to his land policy. After Cosby's death, the old patricians drove some of the newcomers out of office and in 1741 recaptured the mayoralty. This victory was short-lived, for in 1746 Governor George Clinton began to use his powers of appointment and patronage to curb the city's illicit trade with Montreal. Clinton's scheme fell to pieces when he quarrelled with his own supporters elsewhere in the province, but the new patricians whom he had encouraged remained firmly in control of the Albany Common Council.²³

These new patricians snatched at office and its profits and perquisites as though they expected them to be snatched away the next moment. As Pirenne described their counterparts in Dutch cities:

The "new men" of the Renaissance were in fact adventurers. They had no ancestors, no family traditions, and their fierce eagerness to acquire riches manifested itself with peculiar intensity and vigor.²⁴

The Ten Eycks, for example, had played very little part in civic affairs before 1740, when they began to be elected to the Common Council two, three, and once (1747) even four at a time. The following year Jacob C. Ten Eyck began a two-year tenure as Mayor. Harme Gansevoort, a merchant whose father had been a brewer and a rising alderman in Cosby's time, was elected alderman in 1748 and appointed City Clerk in 1750. He held these offices in plurality for several years,

²³ Edith M. Fox, *Land Speculation in the Mohawk Country* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1949), pp. 16-23, 39-41; Munsell, *Annals*, VIII, 37-38; Beverly McAnear, "Politics in Provincial New York," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford Univ., 1935), pp. 571-628.

²⁴ Pirenne, p. 204.

although in 1752 an Englishman named Peter Wraxall challenged his right to hold the clerkship. The Common Council backed Gansevoort, who defended himself in the provincial courts and won a favorable verdict in spite of evidence that he had purchased the office.²⁵

The French and Indian War presented the new patricians with great challenges and great opportunities. Hostilities broke out between the English and the French in the Ohio Valley in 1754. In 1755 an intercolonial expedition under Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts arrived in Albany on its way to conquer Canada. This expedition accomplished little, but the following year, as England entered the Seven Years War in Europe, large armies of redcoats descended on Albany. There may have been 3,000 people in the city; at one time 1,400 soldiers were quartered in their homes. Several thousand more were encamped nearby. The troops kept coming for three years, while General Loudoun and Abercrombie failed to take the French fort at Ticonderoga in 1757 and 1758 and General Jeffrey Amherst finally succeeded in 1759. In the same year Quebec fell to General James Wolfe and the Canadian defense collapsed. In 1760 Amherst's army at last marched away from Albany to garrison the conquered empire.

Many Albanians, especially young people, welcomed the soldiers and learned the English language and English manners from them, but older citizens and the city fathers feared that these innovations might be dangerous. The city fathers, however, were much less hostile to the soldiers than they were to the swarm of sutlers, speculators and supply contractors who descended upon Albany in pursuit of war profits. Albany merchants wanted these profits for themselves, and got some of them. The Cuyler family, in particular, made elaborate plans to supply the 1756 expedition against Niagara, which brought them considerable loss when the French captured the supplies. Most of the contracts for supplying the main British armies were let in London and New York. The Albany merchants probably recognized that they did not have the resources or facilities to handle them. They directed their particular resentment against the intrusion of individual sutlers and speculators, many of them Scots, who thought that war-

²⁵ For more details on Gansevoort and Wraxall, see Alice P. Kenney, "The Gansevoorts of Albany and Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Upper Hudson Valley, 1664-1790" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1961), Ch. V.



Sir William Johnson. [From *Dover Publications, Dictionary of American Portraits.*]

time Albany would be a good place to do business. The magistrates tried to discourage the immigrants by discriminatory tax assessments and enforcement of petty and forgotten local ordinances. The partiality of Albany courts and juries in such cases became notorious. The Scots, as stubborn in their way as the Dutch could be in theirs, stood fast and appealed to General Amherst. Amherst turned to the Albanians' neighbor Sir William Johnson.²⁶

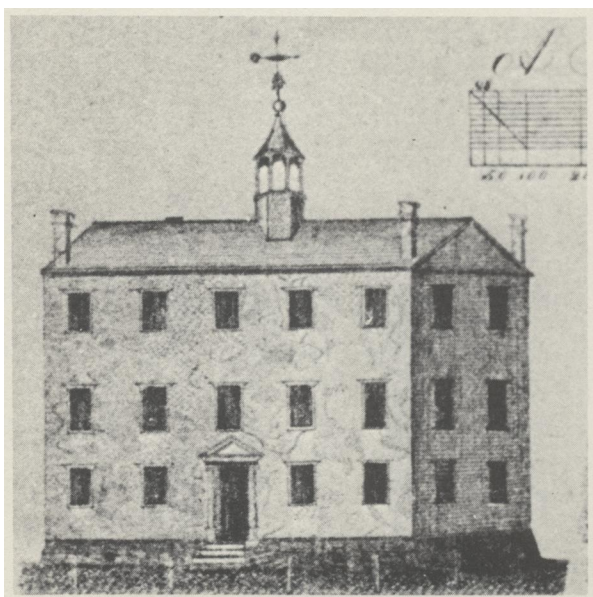
William Johnson and the Albany patricians had been at odds for many years. Johnson, an immigrant from Ireland, lived among the Mohawks and won their confidence and their trade away from the Albanians. At the same time, he persuaded the Indians to give him great tracts of land which he made into a baronial estate in the Mohawk Valley. His victory over the French at Lake George in 1755 made him a military hero and gained him the title of baronet. Most Albanians interested in Indian trade or Mohawk Valley lands detested Johnson, but some who were in local and overseas trade or willing to accept his Indian policy found it profitable to work with him. John-

²⁶ Armour, Ch. X; Edna L. Jacobsen, "Eighteenth Century Merchants in Colonial Albany," *Yearbook of the Dutch Settlers Society of Albany*, XX (1944), pp. 5-15.

son's principal opponents in upper Hudson Valley affairs were the Livingstons, who held a large manor in southern Albany County. During the war they became leaders of an Assembly faction in opposition to that formed around the De Lancey family, to which Johnson was related by marriage. They also had interests in Mohawk Valley lands. In both of these causes they welcomed and encouraged the support of Albanians with similar interests.

Johnson, the Livingstons and British newcomers, both military and mercantile, most frequently interfered in Albany city affairs by trying to take advantage of divisions among the various groups of patrician families. Sometimes their efforts to set the Albanians at odds with each other were so tactless as to be self-defeating. For example, General John Bradstreet, one of Amherst's officers, came back to live near Albany after the war. He then amused himself with an ill-tempered lawsuit against the Albany Dutch Church, concerning an alleged war-time trespass by the military on a pasture belonging to the

The Court House (Stadt Huys). From a plan of the city by Simeon DeWitt, 1794. [Albany Institute of History and Art.]



church. At the time of the trespass the church had been rent by schism intensified by Rev. Theodorus Frelinghuysen's antagonism to all things Anglican, but in the interim a tactful new domine, Eilardus Westerlo, had healed the split and the congregation stood together to repel Bradstreet's attack. He also contemplated a legal assault on the Albany city charter, which might have set Albany patricians holding office from the Crown against their neighbors not so employed, but his own counsel firmly informed him that his charges were ill-founded. In addition, Bradstreet encouraged other Englishmen to make trouble for other Albanians. One of these was Witham Marsh, a British placeman who challenged Harme Gansevoort's right to the city clerkship in 1761. Marsh antagonized the entire Common Council by his insolent behavior the first time he appeared before them, and took advantage of every subsequent opportunity to express his contempt for Albany and its inhabitants. When he finally won his lawsuit for possession of the clerkship, the Albanians refused to permit him to serve, and even after he appointed a respected Albany lawyer as his deputy, Mayor Volkert P. Douw—Gansevoort's brother-in-law—declined to surrender some of the city records.²⁷

The response of the Albany patricians to these intruders resembled the response of Pirenne's patricians to any form of meddling from outside of their own city. They thrust their intramural disagreements and rivalries aside and organized a stubborn and single-minded resistance to external interference which first expressed itself in the Stamp Act riot of January 1766. The Albany Dutch apparently did not think of raising a disturbance over this British constitutional issue until their representatives returned from the Assembly with the idea that the occasion could be used to attack the newcomers and the few Albany Dutch merchants and office-holders who co-operated with Johnson. The mob, which gathered in a tavern and sallied forth to attack these men's homes and property—the most serious damage was the burning of Henry Van Schaack's sleigh—was primarily composed of young patricians and their friends and followers. The victims, the suspected stamp officers, were all either newcomers or Dutch associates

²⁷ John Bradstreet v. Minister, Elders and Deacons of the Reformed Dutch Church of Albany, John Tabor Kempe Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York, N. Y.; Kenney, "Gansevoorts of Albany," Ch. 5.

of Johnson, notably merchants Philip Cuyler and Jacob Vanderheyden and Postmaster Henry Van Schaack.²⁸

In 1770 the newcomers gained the ascendancy when the De Lancey faction consolidated its control of the provincial government. Twenty-eight-year-old Abraham C. Cuyler, a brother of Philip Cuyler and a son of former Mayor Cornelius Cuyler, was appointed Mayor. His very youth may suggest that the De Lanceys had difficulty inducing any Albany patrician to accept the office from their hands. When the American Revolution broke out, Cuyler and his family, who still had imperial ambitions in the fur trade, became Loyalists and were eventually exiled by their fellow-citizens. They were the only Albany Dutch patricians, although by no means the only Albanians, to suffer this fate. Most of the rest were British newcomers. It should be repeated that the Albany Dutch patricians were offended—with good reason—by the newcomers' insolent and grasping behavior as well as by their ethnic origins. The patricians welcomed the long-resident English and Scots families to the Patriot cause, and the first Mayor of Albany after independence was John Barclay, grandson of a pioneer Anglican missionary.²⁹

At the same time that the Albany patricians were contending with these British intruders, their power was challenged by a group of plebians within the city. Its most conspicuous leader was Abraham Yates, the grandson of Joseph Yates, an English soldier, and his Dutch wife. Abraham Yates started life as a shoemaker but later became a lawyer. After at least a decade of political activity in Albany he was elected to the Common Council in 1763 and re-elected annually for ten years thereafter. In 1771 and 1772 he was joined by his cousins Robert and Peter W. Yates. The sight of the three Yates sitting simultaneously, one from each ward, exhausted the patience of the new patricians. They organized opposition and defeated Abraham Yates in the election of 1773. Yates and his running mate William Winne immediately challenged the validity of the poll, but the Common Council sustained the verdict of the election in spite of evidence of unfair practices on both sides. After this contest the Common Council for the

²⁸ Beverly McAneer, "The Albany Stamp Act Riots," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser. IV (1947), pp. 486-98.

²⁹ Alice P. Kenney, "The Albany Dutch: Loyalists and Patriots," *New York History*, Oct., 1961.

first time passed an ordinance setting forth in detail the city's customs regarding residence requirements and property qualifications for voters. Abraham Yates turned his back on the city government and next appeared, with his brother-in-law Jacob Lansing, as a leader of the secret and subversive Committee of Correspondence, which flung aside its secrecy and requested the support of the people at a public meeting ten days after the Battle of Lexington.³⁰

For the first two years of the Revolutionary War the old patricians, the new patricians and the plebians all worked together to resist British invasion and expel the Loyalists. When these tasks became less urgent, the Albany Dutch Patriots remembered their former divisions. The old patricians, led by Generals Philip Schuyler and Abraham Ten Broeck, and the new patricians, led by Volkert P. Douw and his nephews Peter and Leonard Gansevoort, soon discovered a community of interests. They fought together, worked together in civilian public service, and eventually intermarried with each other as the Leislerians and anti-Leislerians had done after 1700. But the plebians, who dominated the city committees while the patricians were away fighting and forming the state government, were sometimes shut out of political affairs and entirely left out of the social circle. They formed their own political faction in opposition to the patricians and intermarried with each other. Not until the nineteenth century did they amalgamate socially with the patricians.

In the meantime, the patricians were contributing to the formation of the new nation on higher levels. This role was new to the Revolutionary generation; their ancestors had played little part even in provincial politics unless and until their commercial interests or local privileges happened to be directly attacked. Philip Schuyler, prominent in the Livingston faction in the Assembly in the 1760's and early 1770's, was the first Albany patrician to become a conspicuous day-to-day leader in provincial affairs. During the Revolution his prestige, influence, and financial support created the Northern Continental army, held it together through two years of demoral-

³⁰ Staughton Lynd, "Abraham Yates' History of the Movement for the United States Constitution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., XX:2 (1963), p. 224; Albany Common Council, Minutes, Sep. 29-Oct. 5, 1773; Aug. 22, 1774; Carl Lotus Becker, *History of Political Parties in the Province of New York* (Madison, Wis., 1909), p. 140; Albany Committee of Correspondence, *Minutes*, ed. James Sullivan (Albany, 1923), May 1, 1775, p. 5.

izing defensive campaigning, supplied it in an agricultural area cut off from its usual sources of manufactured goods, and won it sufficient civilian backing from a population which included some notoriously disaffected elements. In this accomplishment he was assisted by a group of shrewd, stubborn, sensible young Albany patricians—several of them still in their twenties—who served as officers in the army, committee members and city officials, and delegates to the Provincial Congress and eventually the Continental Congress. They helped to write the Constitution of the State of New York and supported the Constitution of the United States. Their contributions were solid, subtle and silent—the underwriting of political expenses, the re-opening of communications between delegates who had disagreed, the unspoken taking for granted of the basic assumptions of a shared tradition of political experience. Such contributions by their very nature cannot be documented, but their role in bringing about the ratification of the Federal Constitution by the New York convention ought not to be overlooked even though the Albany Federalists were present at Poughkeepsie as observers rather than as delegates. It was thus that Albany Dutch patricians made their first but not by any means their last contribution to the development of the American national tradition.

A comparison of the social organization of the Albany Dutch with that of the Netherlands Dutch as Pirenne describes them would hardly be complete without some consideration of the validity of Pirenne's thesis and its applicability to American colonial history. The facts about the Albany Dutch fit very well into the framework of Pirenne's description of the origin and function of the patriciate in Dutch towns. His basic assumption that mediaeval towns were cradles of liberty in a part of Europe that had been the frontier of the ancient world is compatible with Frederick Jackson Turner's conception of the American frontier as the crucible of American liberty. The extent to which his various theses are universally applicable is still a matter of controversy among mediaevalists, but in the Netherlands his work forms the indispensable foundation for the study of urban history. Pieter Geyl, a leading Dutch historian, criticizes Pirenne for partiality toward the Belgian nation, the Walloon faction within Belgium, and the city of Ghent in particular, but acknowledges his own indebtedness to Pirenne's methods and emphasis. Dutch researchers

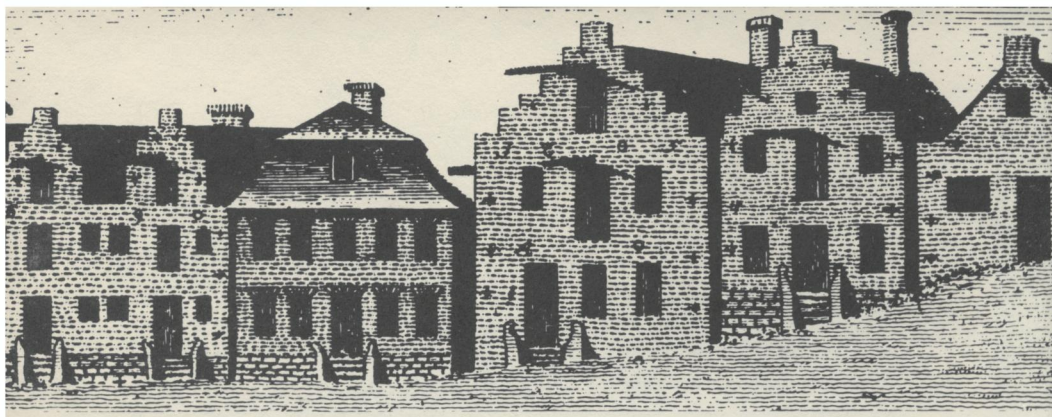
have as yet made few special studies of Dutch cities to prove or disprove Pirenne's hypothesis. Nevertheless, standard historians of the Netherlands in English present a picture of Dutch towns in substantial agreement with his findings. Eric Lampard states that Pirenne's emphasis on the economic factors in the origins of mediaeval towns "now seems to be something of a special case." Oddly enough, Albany is just such a special case, for the "episcopal, juridical, rentier and even princely institutions," which Lampard believes Pirenne neglected were in fact never established there. The same is true of his remark that "Pirenne's notion of the social composition of the urban patriciate tended to underestimate the numbers of feudal officials, the urban residence and office of landholding nobility, or to ignore the fact that newcomers could often make their way into an existing power elite." His observation: "Pirenne virtually discounts the capacity of older structures to transform themselves and hence over-generalizes his distinctive group of 'new' men. As a consequence, he postulated too narrow a basis for recruitment of the mercantile bourgeoisie itself," is well taken.³¹

Some American historians would question whether the institutional differences between Dutch and English towns were in practice noticeable in the American colonies. Carl Bridenbaugh has observed:

. . . their similarities were more striking than their differences. English and Dutch local institutions had much in common, and after 1664, when New Amsterdam became New York, the last vestiges of non-English political life all but disappeared from the American urban scene.³²

³¹ Pirenne makes explicit comparisons between the Netherlands in the early Middle Ages and the American frontier, pp. 2, 9. Discussion of "the Pirenne thesis" can be confusing because authors seem to use that designation indiscriminately for any one of Pirenne's many ideas which they may choose to consider. For example, a well-advertised source book, Alfred J. Havighurst, *The Pirenne Thesis* (Boston, 1958) provides an introduction to the controversy over Pirenne's ideas about Moslem interference with Mediterranean trade in the seventh and eighth centuries, which is entirely unrelated to the origins of Dutch towns. Pieter Geyl, "The National State and the Writers of Netherlands History," *Debates with Historians* (Cleveland, 1958), pp. 203-24; J. Craeybeckx, "Economic History in Belgium and the Netherlands, 1939-1948," *Journal of Economic History* X (1950), pp. 261-72; Boxer, Ch. 1-3; Eric E. Lampard, "Interviews with Historians, IV," *Colloquium* #4, Fall 1965 (John Wiley and Sons, New York), pp. 15-16. I am indebted to Leslie J. Workman of Western College for Women for invaluable specialist assistance with the mediaeval material in this paper.

³² Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York, 1938), pp. 5-6. Tait, pp. 303, 316.



A View of Albany houses. [From Columbia Magazine, December 1789.]

Even in Europe custom had blurred institutional differences; Tait points out that in the later Middle Ages the franchise was practically restricted in many English towns until the Common Councils were in effect chosen by co-optation and the towns run by a merchant oligarchy. The patterns of local government and even of local economic organization may very well have come to be determined by the force of common circumstances, regardless of the forms within which they operated. But the people who used these political and economic institutions to acquire the universal middle class goals of profit and prestige applied the avails of their effort in ways which differed considerably with their ethnic origins.

One such difference between the English and the Dutch was indicated by Sylvia Thrupp when she stated "Merchant families retained a high status for a much shorter span of time in London than was commonly the case in the cities of the Low Countries."³³ A. R. Myers suggests a reason for this: "Those who amassed wealth in trade were usually not content to remain urban patricians, but wished to migrate into the country and become landed gentry."³⁴ In this respect the Dutch merchants of Albany certainly differed from English merchants in New York, whose overwhelming desire to acquire estates and often to retire from trade and go to live on them as manor lords was notorious. The Albany Dutch certainly wanted land grants very much, but they generally saw land as a commodity to buy and sell, an investment to retain,

³³ Sylvia Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Mediaeval London* (Ann Arbor, 1948), p. 191.

³⁴ A. R. Myers, *England in the Late Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, Md., 1956), p. 53.

or perhaps a resource to develop for profit rather than as an estate on which to live the life of a country gentleman.³⁵ Therefore the patrician families, even those who owned large tracts of land, continued to live in Albany and dominate the city, maintaining their power by accepting as patricians other families with newer wealth. In no American city of English origin did the roster of leading families change so little over the entire colonial period. Even in partly-Dutch New York the turnover was much more rapid.³⁶

Pirenne depicted Dutch patricians as self-made men, shrewd in the acquisition of wealth and stubborn in the defense of privileges purchased with that wealth. They competed fiercely and even violently among themselves, but often thrust their differences aside to resist external or internal threats to their domination. So long as their interests and those of the community were concurrent they ruled well, but merchant patrician government was not compatible with large-scale manufacturing, nor particularist privilege with effective central government. Nevertheless, Pirenne points out, the patrician tradition survived and after all the upheavals of proletarian revolt and Spanish conquest, became the usual form of government of cities throughout the Netherlands in early modern times. It is this tradition, "with that remarkable dourness and tenacity of which history furnishes so many examples,"³⁷ which is so clearly identifiable in the colonial history of Albany.

Nevertheless there are important differences between the Pirennean tradition and the Albany tradition which must not be overlooked. Some stem from differences of experience; others from the nature of Pirenne's interpretation. The most obvious is the complete absence from Albany of the craft guilds which revolted against so many patriciates in the Netherlands. Pirenne wrote of them:

It is by their numbers that the workers in the greater industries are most clearly distinguished from those in other

³⁵ With the exception of Philip Schuyler. Don R. Gerlach, *Philip Schuyler and the American Revolution in New York, 1733-1777* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1964), pp. 43-62; Dixon Ryan Fox, *Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York* (New York, 1919), Ch. I.

³⁶ Virginia Harrington, *New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1935), Ch. I; Bernard Bailyn, *New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1964), pp. 135-38; Frederick J. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House* (Chapel Hill, 1948), pp. 119-121.

³⁷ Pirenne, p. 192.

trades. . . . We cannot doubt that in the great Flemish towns the artisans engaged in the cloth trade, with their wives and children, formed the greater part of the population. . . . The crowds of workers in the great industrial towns seemed to have lived in a condition very like that of the modern proletariat. Their existence was precarious, and at the mercy of crises and stoppages. . . . Hence arose the disorders and the rebellious spirit with which they have been so often reproached since the beginning of the 12th century, and of which, for that matter, they have so often given proof. . . . The burgher was a man of his craft before he was a man of his town, and if he had to choose between the good of the craft and the good of the town, his attitude was never in doubt.³⁸

But he also pointed out that the guilds never became so powerful in the smaller cities of the northern Netherlands as they did in the industrial cities of Flanders, with whose institutions he was most concerned because they were most fully developed.

In colonial Albany there were no industries, although there were many craftsmen. They had no formal organizations, although they may have associated with each other informally and their children certainly tended to intermarry. The web of relationship among the Douw, Witbeck, Conyn, Bronck and Gansevoort families, all descended from seventeenth century brewers, is a case in point. Such complexes of interrelated families with some common economic interest seem to have been the principal unit of social participation. This flatly contradicts Pirenne's declaration:

In barbarous times a man was only a person by virtue of the family community to which he belonged; in mediaeval times he was a burgher by virtue of the civic community of which he was a part. . . . The country outside was patriarchal in its organization. In the town the idea of paternal power was replaced by that of brotherhood.³⁹

He himself pointed out in other contexts, however, that both patrician position and guild membership descended from father to son, which suggests that the extended family complex was eventually the fundamental unit of social organization in Dutch towns as well as in Albany.

Another point at which the Albany Dutch differed from the Dutch as Pirenne saw them was in their importance as in-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95, 159, 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

dividuals. Pirenne thought that individuals had little influence on economic and social processes.

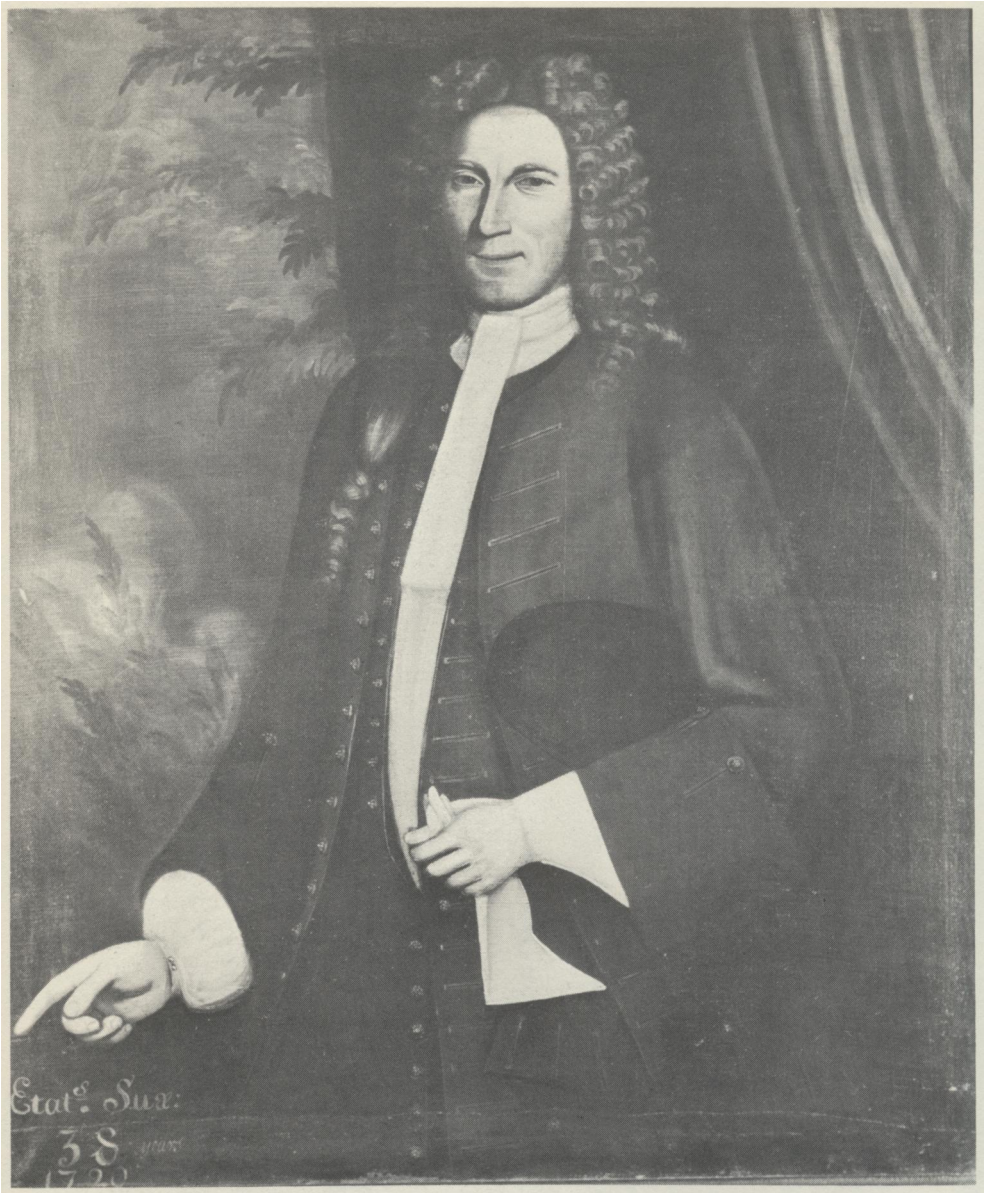
Nothing, perhaps, among all the social organisms created by man, recalls more strongly the societies of the animal kingdom—I refer here to ants and bees—than do the mediaeval communes. In both cases there is the same subordination of the individual to the whole, the same co-operation for the sake of a livelihood, for the maintenance and defence of the community, the same hostility towards the stranger, the same pitiless disregard of the useless.⁴⁰

He mentions very few Netherlanders by name. It is true that, with the exception of Pieter Schuyler, no pre-Revolutionary Albany Dutchmen are well known; only when the Dutch are grouped into families and the political, social and economic relationships among the families traced genealogically does any coherent pattern appear in Albany's history. Nevertheless, the Albanians were neither ants nor bees. Their portraits painted by local limners, reveal men and women of intelligence and character, shrewd, stubborn, sensible, and sharply differentiated. Perhaps they were most individual when they acted in the interests of their families, but they themselves can never have lost sight of each others' personalities, or underestimated the effects of each others' decisions. Their social relations must have resembled those which Pirenne describes elsewhere, contradicting his own thesis as quoted above:

Everybody knew everybody else in the "great towns" of the Middle Ages, and party strife was intensified by personal rivalries and quarrels. The personal identity of the individual was not in those days lost in a nameless crowd. Each individual man with his passions and interests appeared in the full light of day. There was nothing abstract or theoretical about politics. It was not a fight for a programme: the adversaries met face to face and marched against each other as foes. Political convictions, sharpened by personal antipathies, were easily exasperated to the point of ferocity. . . . Each man became conscious of his own worth. If he were without pity for his adversary in times of strife, he also knew how to do his duty to the utmost when the interests of the town were at stake. If the need arose he was ready to lay down his life for his town.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106. For the Albany portraits, see Mary C. Black, ed., *Hudson Valley Limners* (Syracuse, N. Y., forthcoming). Alice P. Kenney, "The Dutch Tradition in the Upper Hudson Valley," in that work, considers art, religion and family life among the Albany patricians, and is in those respects a companion piece to the present article.



Anthony Van Schaick. Oil on canvas by an unknown painter, 1720. [Albany Institute of History and Art.]

A final aspect of Pirenne's thesis which is not consonant with the Albanians' experience is his interpretation of "democracy." He used the word ambiguously, applying it both in the favorable sense of the popular rule and human freedom desired by late nineteenth century European liberal "democrats" and also in the invidious Aristotelian sense of disorderly rule by mob violence. Neither of these meanings is relevant to the colonial Albany Dutch patricians. After a century and a half in the New World they were still as indifferent to formal education as their immigrant ancestors had been innocent of it. If they had heard of "democracy" at all they probably considered it another "Yankee notion." Yet as a matter of fact the Albany patrician system produced many of the results we expect from "democratic" government. It ruled the city efficiently and without major disorder. It maintained and regulated municipal facilities such as markets and ferries for the benefit of all citizens. It provided that the most responsible citizens held the offices of trust, profit and power. The rest of the burghers could exert leverage on these officials when it was important to them by means of family relationship, commercial credit, and past political obligation. Ambitious individuals could rise to the patriciate by making a fortune or a politic marriage, but it was more usual for a man to amass wealth, encourage his children to marry advantageously, and hope to see his grandchildren sit on the Common Council and intermarry with older patricians. The system as it developed was orderly, open to all and accepted by all. In the earlier years, especially, it was even open to English immigrants who accepted its conditions. It came through the French and Indian War unshaken, weathered the Revolution unscathed, and contributed its tradition of government, its financial support and its tenacity in self-defense to the establishment and maintenance of New York State and the Federal Union. Like their counterparts in the mediaeval Netherlands the Dutch patricians of colonial Albany had good reason to believe that their exercise of the liberties it was their privilege to possess would in fact make it possible for their compatriots to enjoy likewise their own particular liberties.