

ANCIENT EASTCHESTER RECALLS WASHINGTON

By Sarah Comstock.

YESTERDAY, only yesterday, to him who can picture the past, did George Washington bend to impress a kiss upon the cheek of his tavern hostess in old Eastchester. Yesterday did the Gros-Jeans, sturdy Huguenot family, don their cleanest apparel and set off from their little Eastchester homestead for church in New York. Yesterday did loyal patriots steal to a hiding place, bearing secretly the Bible and church bell. Yesterday did President Adams make this old village the Nation's capital by his brief residence there.

Tomorrow barely a landmark will be left. And this tomorrow will be a speedy one. Any day this Summer may see the passing of the old Gros-Jean dwelling. At this very hour the house where Adams tarried is being remodeled. Already the Guion tavern is gone.

The only Eastchester building which shows any sign of permanence is the Church of St. Paul, and if any of you are history lovers, and have not as yet prowled through the tradition-haunted roads of Eastchester, then do not waste a day, for the hand of the destroyer is being laid heavily upon it. One of the oldest, one of the most charming villages of Westchester County is passing, to make way for encroaching business and widening roads. Soon it will be a mere memory, and a dim memory at that.

In the growth of Greater New York, a portion of this old town was absorbed into the Bronx, leaving another portion within the limits of Mount Vernon. Thus not even its name and boundary lines remain. It is "Eastchester" by courtesy only; pushing modernism has devoured it, and it gazes forth at the hurry of today like a faded but once lovely daguerreotype from a shabby frame. But blot out the noisy, smelly, smoky surroundings; look at its shaded, winding roads, its knolls covered with giant trees, its dilapidated but picturesque little old dwellings—can you not call up a picture of restful loveliness, a village of charming quaintness?

For a half day's visit to old Eastchester, take the Bronx Park Subway to its end at 180th Street, walk east to the New York Westchester & Boston Railway, and travel on that electric line to the station at Kingsbridge Road. To reach this electric line without walking, go north on the Third Avenue Elevated to 129th Street, where a shuttle will transfer you to the railway. Thus the route is both short and simple.

As you leave the train, you will see the spire of old St. Paul's Church rising to greet you. This early English church is one of the most historic among all our old houses of worship which stand today. It is intimately connected with the Revolution, and among the 6,000 who lie buried in the surrounding yard are many who fought in that war.

If you visit it on a Sunday morning you may enter and attend the service, which is conducted as regularly today as it was in the early centuries of our nation. The yard is never permitted to run to seed; the building never lacks repair. Within its walls is treasured a collection of precious relics, among them a very old Bible and prayer book, and thereby hangs the building's most exciting tale.

While our country was in the throes of battling for independence, the British at one time advanced toward this village and the patriots knew that there was no hope of saving it from occupation. Always a church was a tempting spot to the enemy, for a large and sturdy building served excellently as a hospital, and the Americans could easily guess what would soon happen to St. Paul's. They trembled less for themselves than for the precious books and communion service which had been presented to their church by Queen Anne. So they determined to save these at any cost, and let what would happen to the community.

Therefore, they seized their treasures, and set out for the Vincent-Halsey estate, a great country seat further down the road, and a spot which we are soon to visit. The Vincents were owners of the property at that time. As there was no telling what might happen to the house itself, the patriots did not risk hiding their valuables within its walls, but dug a deep hole in the surrounding grounds, and therein buried Bible, prayer book, communion service and huge bell. It was not until the war was over that they dared to dig them up and restore them to their original headquarters in the church which, fortunately, had been spared.

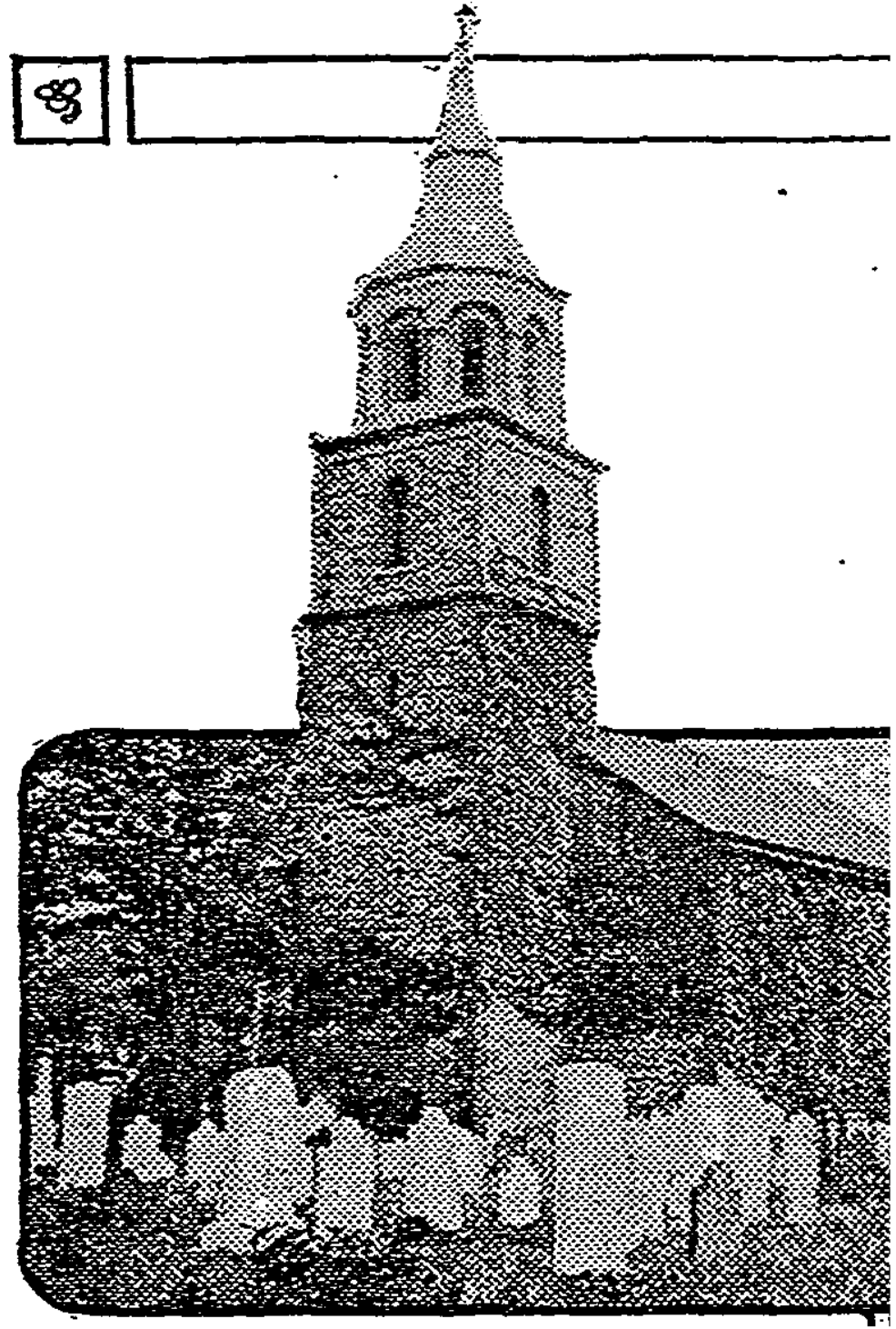
The building which you now see dates from 1761, although the meeting-house from which it sprung was erected a little north of the present site as far back as 1692. The settlement of the town began in 1664, so it has a good right to be respected as venerable.

Many an interesting old headstone may be read in the yard. Could anything be prettier than the inscription of a mother-in-law who planted a little headstone to commemorate the fact that her daughter-in-law had proved all that a daughter-in-law could be? Such a memorial restores one's faith in human nature. And far down the slope, in a remote corner of the yard, you will come on two small but important stones.

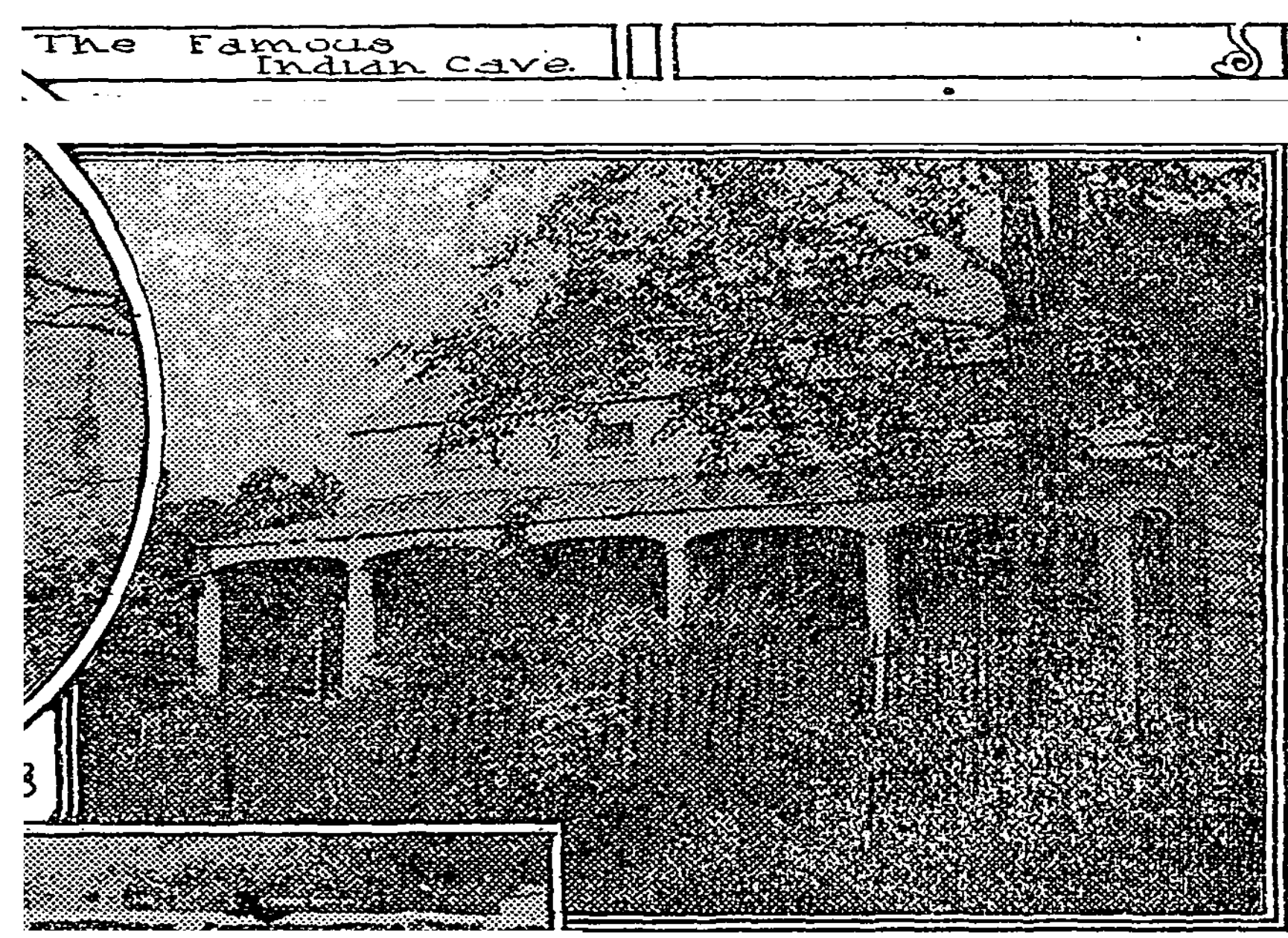
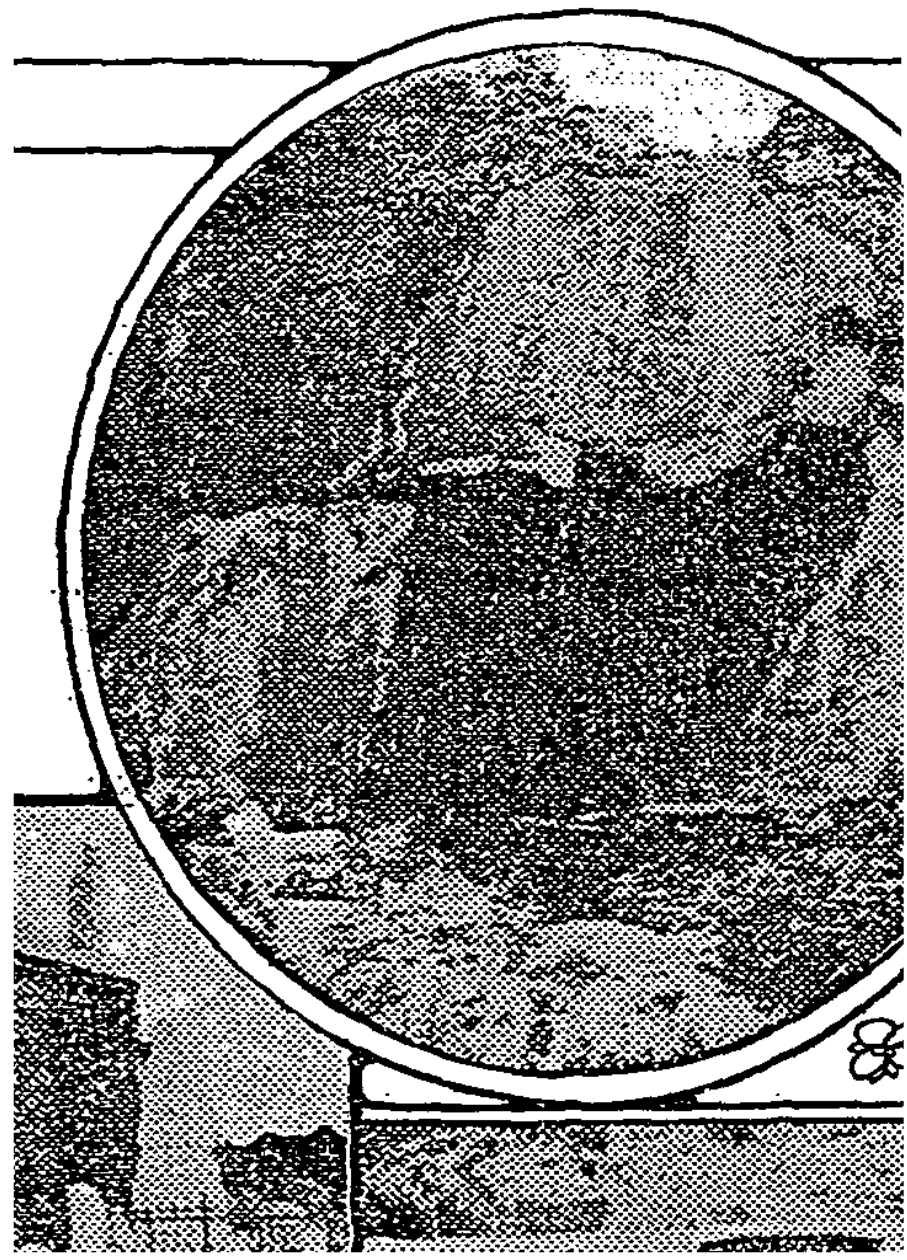
One of these marks the resting spot of a group of American soldiers' skeletons found at Tuckahoe. They were brought to this spot and interred, and the Bronx Chapter of the D. A. R. erected the stone. Close beside this grave is the site of the sand-pit, also marked by the same society, wherein were interred a number of Hessian soldiers who died in the church while it was used as a military hospital in 1776.

The land in front of this church was once the village green. Here the punishments of primitive days took place—the guilty were whipped at a post or craned within the stocks or

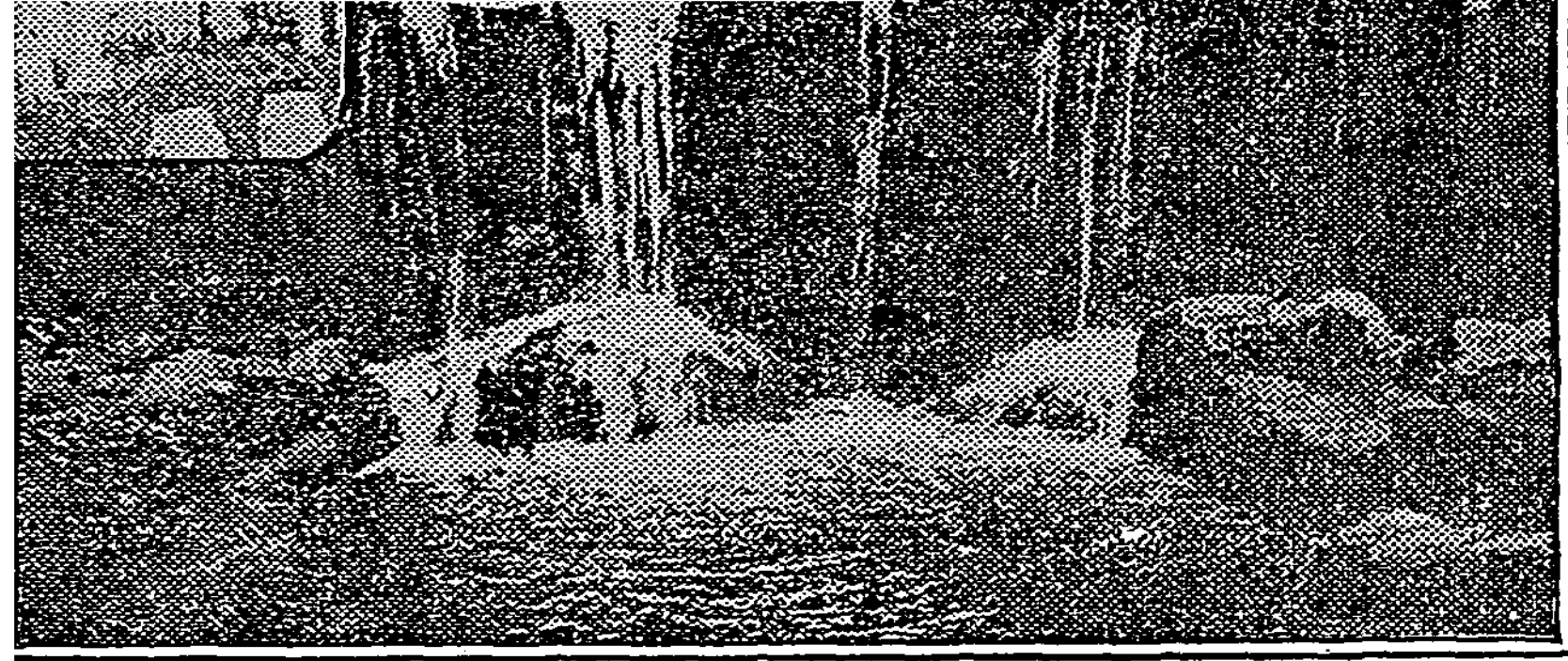
An Interesting One-Day Trip Can Readily be Made to the Spot Where the First President Kissed the Cheek of His Hostess, and Where Tories Flourished



St. Paul's the Historic Church of Eastchester



Old Home of Mother Gros-Jean



Seton's Falls, on the old Seton Estate, near Eastchester

shamed at the pillory. Only in the latter part of the last century there was a ring to be seen, attached to one of the trees in the yard, to which slaves were tied and there lashed. Jenkins, who describes the church fully in "The Old Boston Post Road," adds: "I have no doubt that many a white man also here received his nine-and-thirty lashes."

The building became a court of justice for a period after the war, and Aaron Burr often pleaded his causes within it. Among the relics preserved is a summons issued for Burr.

Elections took place on the village green, a famous one being that of 1733, in which Judge Lewis Morris won out in a contest with the schoolmaster William Forster. Morris represented the people, while his opponent was the choice of the aristocratic party, led by a member of the De Lancey family, and one of the Philipses. It is related that the struggle was made harder by the disfranchisement of the Quakers, who refused to swear in their votes, but for all this loss of many a ballot Morris won, nevertheless.

In Revolutionary days it was Billy Crawford who kept the popular Tory tavern across the street. Today it is a rather shabby white house surrounded by truck gardens. In those early times it was customary for the village fathers to insist that the tavern be placed near enough to the church for the congregation to avail themselves of it between services. In winter they barely survived the frigidty of the church, and it was essential that they be warmed back to a proper sense of piety by visiting the tavern's fire and other "warmers" before the next service began. So Billy's tavern was extremely handy for the frozen Eastchester congregation, as you can still see for yourselves. It was the house which was made famous by the hanging of a British deserter to the signpost before its door.

The Fay family owned the house originally and returned to it after the war, and it is still known as the Fay homestead. One of our early Ministers to Switzerland was a member of the family and resided here, Theodore Sedgwick Fay.

Turn your face toward the south now, and walk on past the station and along Provost Avenue. You will pass a few buildings, grouped together, close to the street; then, only a short distance beyond, appears a shabby little old house at your left, set back from the street, on a slope above it. The little house is almost buried in vines and smothered by huge lilac bushes, and through its grounds you can trace the bed of a tiny brook.

This is the old "Groschon" house, as the neighborhood knows it, once the home of the Huguenot family of Gros-Jean, quaint and tumbledown, a representative of early French settlements, when this dwelling was an overflow from the New Rochelle settlement of poor refugees from France.

Not so many years ago did the last of them, old Mother Gros-Jean, dwell within these walls. She had lived there, a lonely widow, for many years. Her peaches and her flowers were her hobby. What a picture the chatty neighbors even now conjure up!

"She was a kind o' cranky old lady, an' when we was children we did love to tease her," one of them owned to me—she herself, no longer young, was recalling her childhood days when the venerable. "The boys would steal her peaches—they wasn't bad boys, but they had to do it just because they was boys, an' they wanted to see her come out an' shake her stick an' holler at 'em. An' then we'd sneak in by the brook and take her calamus—we wasn't bad girls, neither, but it was fun to see her come after us, too."

Can't you see her, the lonely, crabbed old dame, with her stick and her violent vituperations, scuttling like an angry hen after the troublesome boys in her orchard behind, then turning, all distracted, and more and more like an angry hen, to shake and scold at the giggling little girls cribbing flavor-some calamus root, the old-time sweet flag, growing beside the brook? When the present tenants moved into the house they found its garden a very paradise of bloom and its trees laden with golden peaches: the wealth of the droll, crabbed, diligent old Huguenot dame.

A little further along the same street and at your right is seen what remains of the Vincent-Halsey house, in whose grounds the church's treasures were

hidden. A while ago the old residence was partially burned, and when I visited it the other day I found it being remodeled so rapidly that it will not be long before the old outline is destroyed. A portion of the pompous entrance gate still stands.

When the Vincents occupied the place, in Revolutionary period, it is said that one Gilbert Vincent was killed through a curious circumstance. The family was pious, and remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The story runs that a French officer with some Americans arrived one Sunday at the smithy kept by the Vincent family. He demanded that his horses be shod, and at once Stubbly Gilbert Vincent replied that he could not do any work upon the Lord's day, and, in spite of urgings, which rose to angry demands on the Frenchman's part, he stuck to his refusal. At last the officer grew so enraged that he could endure it no longer, and he struck him to the ground with such blows that Vincent died.

Elijah Vincent vowed to avenge his brother's death. To punish the Americans and French whom he held to blame, he joined the British forces, taking a commission, and devoted himself to making all possible trouble for the patriots and their French friends in and around Eastchester.

In the year 1797 the house was occupied by Colonel William Smith, who had married Abigail Adams, the daughter of the President of the United States. The President was residing in the Nation's capital, which was then Philadelphia. A scourge of yellow fever swept that city, and it was deemed important that the Nation's Chief Executive should move away until safety was restored. He therefore left the capital and came to his daughter's home at Eastchester for October and November, thus making the old house the executive mansion for that time. "Eastchester" is the heading of some of his letters.

Near this house was once the Guion Inn, now, alas, no longer to be seen. It was one of Washington's stopping places. His diary reports a visit to it, and adds that the roads hereabouts, were "immensely rough and stony." On one occasion he was detained there by sickness. His hostess showed him every possible attention, and upon leaving he asked what he could offer

her in recompense. It was her husband who proposed the reward; he requested the great chief to kiss his wife.

Whereupon a kiss was imprinted on the landlady's blushing cheek, and it was Mr. Guion's order that the cheek should never be washed again.

An important meeting was held in the old tavern in 1783, when Governor Clinton called the civil authorities together to prepare to take the place of the military authorities who would no longer be needed with the British evacuation about to take place.

In old days there were mills in this vicinity, and the brush of Edward Gay, N. A., has often been busy putting their quaint charm upon canvas. Mr. Gay's home was in Mount Vernon, and he came to know the old mills and love them. But they have vanished, even to Reid's, the well-known tide mill, built in 1739. All the farmers in the vicinity of Eastchester once brought their grists here.

Still earlier were the mills of John Tompkins and Stephen Anderson among the saw and grist mills of the first settlers. The Hutchinson River, named for Anne Hutchinson, was used to turn wheels long ago. Her tragic name is inseparably linked with this region, whither she fled from New England persecution and where she found little peace.

She came from Rhode Island in 1643, and settled at Pelham Neck. The Dutch named the neck for her—"Anne's Hoeck"—and the stream beside which her house stood still bears her name. Her murder by savage Indians was the end of her tragic story, all her family being slain at the same time except the granddaughter, who was borne off a captive.

And now there's a delightful close to your day. Cross from the Vincent-Halsey house toward the Dyre Avenue station; pass it, and turn west on Two Hundred and Thirty-third Street. After passing a large building on the right you will see thick growth on both sides; and inasmuch as this jungle is not charted, there is no better advice to be given than that you shall ask the first small boy who comes your way how to find the Indian Cave. For small boys abound hereabouts, inasmuch as there's swimming in a pool below; and was ever a small boy so ignorant as not to know an Indian cave if it was anywhere about? There it stands, gaping with a

hungry black mouth, deep in the jungle. It is said that early Indians used it for a hiding place, and the rock around marked their fortifications. Some of these have fallen, but there is still a suggestion of the warlike past. The cave is sufficiently full of mystery to delight any Peter Pan of a heart, and if you can't find joy therein it's your own fault that you were foolish enough to grow up.

Keep on along the road, and you approach the old Seton estate. Through it runs Rattlesnake Brook, once the headquarters for many a huge reptile, but quite unvisited by rattlers today. Some forty years ago a six-foot snake was killed here. Wolves, too, were well known in this district, and deer. A large wolf pit was long to be seen on the Purdy estate.

It is known that this was a happy hunting ground for Indians, the Siwanoy being the mighty hunters who enjoyed it, and they owned much of the land, as shown by some of the early Indian deeds. It is supposed that they did not live here, as no signs of permanent habitation were ever found, but that they kept the land for the purpose of hunting. Many arrow heads and spear heads have been found everywhere about.

In early days the wolves were so troublesome about Eastchester that bounties were offered for their extermination and pits were dug. But neither wolves, snakes, nor deer are to be seen now any nearer than in the Bronx Park Zoo, and no timorous visitor may fear to wander over these picturesque old lands.

At last you come to the Seton Falls, where you may picnic and loaf and finish the Summer day in the shade of giant old trees and beside a delightfully noisy brook. Over a height of thirty feet the water tumbles in two beautiful little falls, churning and foamy. The gorge is narrow and shadowed by deep green. A perfect horseshoe is described by the falls, and below this is a dark pool, where jolly young swimmers frolic. Bring the youngsters and their bathing suits, and let them join the crowd.

For generations this beautiful picnic ground has been known to children and their elders, who find dogwood blooms there in the Spring, and wander day after day through the Summer until the dogwood bears its red berries of Autumn. And yet many a Manhattanite never visited the place, one of the loveliest within the limits of Greater New York.

On the old Seton estate was one of the early mills, and the tossing, frothing water which now delights the visitor, as it pitches over the dark rocks, furnished the force to turn that old mill's wheel.

The Morgan residence was built on a spot where wigwags had formerly stood, and Dr. Frank Bergen Kelley states in his "Historical Guide to the City of New York" that a fortified castle of the Indians stood on the hill behind the Fowler mansion, and that here the early settlers erected a "General Fort." But reports concerning the Siwanoy are sparse, and but few definite facts can be ob-

tained. The spear and arrow heads, however, can't be disputed; we know that at least they hunted where we are rambling peacefully today.