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 **Information About St. Paul's Church, the Battle of Pelham and Other Revolutionary War Events Near Pelham Contained in An Account Published in 1940**

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Noted Westchester County Historian Otto Hufeland authored a book published in 1940 entitled "Early Mount Vernon". The book included information about St. Paul's Church in Eastchester which, of course, now sits in an area within the Town of Mount Vernon. For many years during the 18th and early 19th centuries the church was one of the only ones in the area close enough to be attended by residents of Pelham. Below is an excerpt from the book about the church.

"The Post Road to Boston, it will be understood, ran from 'Kings Bridge' over the Harlem River to and through the County to Boston and was the only road at that time, and it was on that road that the Eastchester people located their little church just above where the Westchester Path came into it. Originally the Eastchester people had worshipped with those from Westchester, but in 1693 they passed the following resolution:

'At a Meeting of the Inhabitants of Eastchester, held the 9th of May 1693, they have agreed by voat to Build a Metting hous according to the dimenshuns agreed upon.'

This 'Metting hous' was one of the first houses in the present City of Mount Vernon and its 'dimenshuns' were supposed to be 'twenty-eight feet square and about eighteen feet to the eaves; the sides as well as the roof being shingled which latter met together in an apex.' Around this small church were gathered the few houses that afterwards constituted the Village of Eastchester and this is the beginning of our history.

The new stone church which followed this was erected on the 'Green' opposite the old wooden church so that the roadway was between them. This we have from old Dr. Coffey, who told us that Philemon Fowler stepped into a hole where the rain had washed away the earth and exposed the foundation of the old church quite clearly. In fact, the old church was still standing during the Revolution because sol- [Page 4 / Page 5] diers gathered some of the wood to make the new building more comfortable for the wounded who were put into the new building in 1776. This old building was probably east or northeast of the present stone church. Although the present building was begun in 1764, it had no flooring in it during the Revolution and was not finished until 1787.

Around these two buildings were laid the remains of the fathers, mothers and children of the settlers and [Photograph of the Stone Church Appears Here] residents of the vicinity. They should not be disturbed. From the old field stone markers to the more elaborate monuments and vaults, they form the only connection this age has with the days of long ago. An old field stone, all that the time could afford, with the inscription 'R. S. d. Dec. 14 1704' is still there and is the oldest inscription we can decipher. It is over the grave of Richard Shute who died December 1704, the old 'Recorder' to whose loving care we are indebted for the record of all we know of the old settlers. It should be carefully protected. [Page 5 / Page 6]

The 'Church Green' was the gathering place for the people of the vicinity. In 1733 a celebrated election took place there. A large number of people gathered there to elect a member of the Assembly. The decision was against the wishes of the governor and was at once overruled by him. This tyrannical proceeding was upset by a jury of the people in court. Any one desirous of reading the whole of this interesting trial may find it at

length in Bolton's History of Westchester County, as it is too long to quote here.

There was quite a little fighting during the Revolution on the ground covered by Mount Vernon now. On October 17th, 1776 Colonel Glover, who had been sent by General Nixon from Mile Square to watch the British and prevent them from cutting off Washington in his retreat from New York to White Plains, camped in a bend of the Boston Post Road where it crosses the Hutchinson River at Wolf's Lane, where the public playground now is. In the morning after his arrival he climbed the hill at the foot of the present McClellan Avenue and looking down the valley of the river, he saw a great number of vessels landing, down where the present Pelham Bridge crosses Eastchester Bay. He at once went back and ordered his men to march through Wolf's Lane and the Split Rock Road and post themselves behind the stone fences on the high side of the road and he himself marched with a small body of men to an eminence beyond and there he awaited the coming of the enemy. As soon as they came within range, his men fired and then retreated along the Split Rock Road to the next regiment posted behind the stone walls, who gave the British a similar reception and so down the whole line until they found the British occupying higher ground than the Americans, when the latter withdrew to their camp across the Hutchinson River, but not before they had [Page 6 / Page 7] taken up the planks of the bridge which crossed that stream. This skirmish of about 750 men who opposed the British army of 4000 was completely successful and permitted Washington to retreat with his small army unmolested to White Plains. The flagstaff on the hill and the tablet just inside the playground entrance mark this important engagement. The American loss was eight men killed, thirteen wounded, while the British loss was estimated at 140 to 150 killed and wounded. The British wounded were carried to the Eastchester church and the Americans withdrew towards Dobbs Ferry.

The bell in the church, which had been presented to it by the Rev. Thomas Standard, was taken down either before or after the battle and was buried together with the Bible and prayerbook. The general belief is that this was done to protect it from the British but the following resolution of the Provincial Congress shows that this probably was not the case.

Fishkill Oct. 5, 1776. Resolved unanimously. That his Excellency Gen. Washington be requested and authorized to cause all the Bells in the different churches and public edifices in the City of New York to be taken down . . . that the fortunes of war may throw the same out of the hands of the enemy . . .

Besides, this was an Episcopal church none too friendly to the American cause. Another good reason was that it was buried in the Vincent place and the Vincents were thought to be tories. The Vincent House which stood just below the Mount Vernon boundary on the Post Road, was later purchased by Colonel Wm. S. Smith who was a son-in-law of President John Adams. During the prevalence of the yellow fever in Philadelphia he visited there and made it the 'Nation's Capitol' for a few days.

In connection with the Vincent House it is necessary to relate an incident that occurred there in No- [Page 7 / Page 8] vember 1779 which has caused some discussion. A body of American mounted troops under Colonel Armond passed through there on a secret expedition. It was found necessary to shoe a horse which Vincent, the local blacksmith, refused to do because it was Sunday and he was out of coal. The excuse was a poor one for in those days when horses could not be delayed on religious scruples or for any other cause, it was necessary to shoe a horse on Sunday as well as on week days. A dispute arose during which Vincent was shot. Vincent was a member of a suspected tory family and this brought the fight to a bitterness which resulted in his death. The original Vincent house was a small one, about 25 by 18 feet with a lean-to twelve feet deep, where he probably shod the horses, and one and one-half stories high, making the whole about 25 by 30 feet. Colonel Smith, when he purchased the property, built the portion that was two and one-half stories, that we knew as the Halsey house.

But to go back to the battle which was fought by Colonel Glover. A few days after that battle a small body of Americans stole across the Bronx and 'started to carry off three tubs of shirts' from a house where washing was being done by the British. On being discovered they dropped the shirts and ran, but meeting a party that had been sent after them, they attacked the Hessian outpost, killing ten and taking two prisoners. This

happened at the tavern of Robert Morell near where the Judge Mills house, now the Free Synagogue of Westchester, stands.

On August 22nd, 1777 there was quite a skirmish at Eastchester Church. General Putnam, hearing that the British guard at the hospital was small, sent General Varnum there to capture some hospital supplies, of which the Americans were so much in need. The ex- [Page 8 / Page 9] pedition was successful in driving off the guard, and while they were busy gathering the supplies, Varnum sent a detachment out to investigate the neighborhood. While they were absent the British returned in force and drove off the invaders, killing a captain and a number of privates.

About the middle of July a body of Americans scouting along the Bronx at Mount Vernon were discovered by a larger body of British under Simcoe, and the latter tried to lure them into an ambushade by sending a few cavalry down the hill opposite and placing an infantry column on both sides of the road that led to Hunt's Bridge hoping that the Americans would come down after the cavalry. But the officers of the ambushade were seen by the Americans, who turned their guns on them and caused them to beat a hasty retreat.

A map prepared by Colonel Rufus Putnam, chief engineer of the American army, later in the year shows a heavy guard on a line extending from Valentine's Hill to Eastchester over the intervening Mount Vernon. There were Hessian grenadiers at Valentine's Hill, British infantry regiments on both sides of Bronx River, and Grenadier, Light Guards, and Light Dragoons between them on the road to Eastchester.

As the war neared its end, the success of the raids on the British outposts became so common that the raiders became careless and even boastful. It was on one of these raids that the Westchester guide, Brom Dyckman, lost his life. On March 4th, 1782 Captain Honeywell, with a body of volunteers backed by a battalion of infantry under Major Woodbridge, made a raid on Delancey's camp at Morrisania. The latter were posted to cover the retreat while Honeywell, passing close to Fort Number 8, at daylight galloped into the British camp. Taken by surprise, the enemy fired [Page 9 / Page 10] a few shots and ran, while Honeywell started back along the White Plains Road with twenty prisoners and as many horses. But the firing had aroused the garrisons of the fort and they followed the raiders as far as the present Scott's Bridge where Woodbridge's infantry were lying awaiting them. After firing a few shots the British retired to rest their tired infantry. While they were in this position Brom Dyckman and his cousin rode out from the American rear guard waving their swords as a challenge. A British rifleman who had crept up behind a stone fence fired a shot at long range which unfortunately terminated Brom's career. He was led from the field by his cousin and died a few days later. A monument to his memory was erected by the State at Crompound Church where he lies buried together with Colonel Greene and Major Flagg who were killed later at Yorktown in the upper part of the County.

Mount Vernon was part of the 'Neutral Ground' where there were almost daily fights between the cowboys and the skinners, both vagabonds and robbers, who robbed either side when they were able to beat the farmers.

In connection with the Revolution, perhaps Aaron Burr should be mentioned here. Court was held for a while in the Eastchester Church and Burr often had occasion to visit it on business. There was, however, another reason that brought him there. His wife came frequently to visit Frederick Prevost, her son by her first husband, who lived in the first house on the right hand side of the New Boston Post Road after you crossed the bridge (Lockwood's) into the town of Pelham.

When on March 13, 1783 General Carleton notified Governor Clinton that the last of the British forces would be withdrawn from Westchester County, it be- [Page 10 / Page 11] [Photograph of Guion's House Fills Page 11] [Page 11 / Page 12] came necessary to provide some means to govern the State until a permanent government could be installed. For that purpose he appointed a 'Committee for the Temporary Government of the Southern Part of the State' and the members of this Committee met at Guion's tavern and functioned there until it was dissolved. The tavern has now completely disappeared, but its location is marked by a tablet

on the south side of the Old Boston Post Road a little below St. Paul's Church."

Source: Hufeland, Otto, Early Mount Vernon, pp. 4-12 (Mount Vernon, NY: Privately Printed by Mount Vernon Public Library 1940).

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posted by Blake A. Bell @ 4:43 AM