

believed that these cattle were the only permanent residents of Nutten Island until Van Twiller interested himself in the property.

As the governor stood by the fort and looked south across the half mile of open water to the shores of his new possession, he had every reason to be pleased with his bargain. In area, his surveyors reported that the island comprised some hundred-and-sixty-odd acres. The shore line was generally sandy, with a few rocks at its northern tip. Only a narrow sedge-filled creek, that was easily fordable at low tide, separated Nutten Island's eastern rim from the meadows of Long Island's Vlachte Bos (eventually to be Anglicized into Flatbush). At its northeast

corner, the rolling surface of the island swept up to a commanding eminence, that at once commended itself to Van Twiller as the ideal spot for another executive mansion. This one would be set in majesty, though lonely dignity, among the groves of hickory, oak and chestnut trees, which gave the property its name of Nutten (or Nut) Island. For some unknown reason, the usually acquisitive Dutchman failed to carry out this project. It was rumored that the tide rips between New Amsterdam and Nutten Island made it impractical

to cross over in sailboats. As Van Twiller's overstuffed physique did not permit him to fit in anything as narrow as a rowboat, he had to content himself with building a caretaker's hut and pasturing a herd of 21 pairs of goats on the island. Then in 1638, he was peremptorily recalled to Holland, and although he went back to his homeland with his ambition for wealth fulfilled — he had become the richest landowner in the colony, by his recent acquisition of Ward's and Randall's Islands in the East River — an unfeeling government declared his purchase of Nutten Island had been illegal. The premises were confiscated and turned back to the public domain, henceforth to be considered a privilege of the local governors. The island has never since reverted to private ownership.

Wilhelm Kieft succeeded Van Twiller in New Amsterdam's director's chair and proved to be a yet more unfortunate selection than the doughty Wouter, implausible as that may seem. He came to America direct from a bankruptcy conviction in

Amsterdam, where his portrait, following the Dutch custom, had been nailed to the city's gallows. Also, there were persistent rumors that he had stolen government funds entrusted to him for the rescue of certain Christian captives held for ransom by the Turks.

The new governor proved to have neither wisdom, nor humanity, and his regime was marked by constant and bloody quarrels with Native Americans, corruption in his family, and political patronage carried to an extreme.

Being a somewhat shrewder operator than his predecessor, Kieft was quick to turn to his own advantage, the natural opportunities offered by

Nutten Island. He first restored to usefulness, the long neglected equipment for a saw mill. The equipment, which had been brought over from Holland by some now-forgotten Dutch trader at the time of the original founding of the colony, had lain rusting on the island's shores ever since. With plenty of trees to furnish logs for the mill, plenty of wind for the sails that turned the machinery, and plenty of water to float the sawed planks to the New Amsterdam market, Nutten Island was an ideal spot for such an

enterprise. Kieft had no trouble in immediately renting the mill to a trio of his countrymen. His lease, in which he optimistically referred to himself as "the Honorable, Wise and Prudent," stipulated that the rent of the mill should be 500 planks a year; one-half to be pine and one-half ash.

Encouraged by the success of this private speculation at public expense, the governor next rented out a large tract of land on the island for a tobacco plantation, again taking his rent in kind, this time for 150 pounds of tobacco annually. Wilhelm Kieft was sent home in disgrace in 1647, but he did not live to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. He drowned when the ship on which he was returning to Holland was wrecked off the coast of England, with the loss of almost all on board.

The great Peter Stuyvesant, he of the fiery temper and the silver banded peg leg, came to govern New Amsterdam following the unfortunate Kieft. But, his only interest in Nutten Island seems to have been the removal of the saw mill, which had

Wouter Van Twiller became the first and only private owner of Governors Island, one of the oldest and most historic of American sites.
