

Nooks and Corners of Old New York

I

Fort Amsterdam

On the centre building of the row which faces Bowling Green Park on the south there is a tablet bearing the words:

THE SITE OF FORT AMSTERDAM, BUILT IN 1626.
WITHIN THE FORTIFICATIONS WAS ERECTED
THE FIRST
SUBSTANTIAL CHURCH EDIFICE ON THE ISLAND
OF MANHATTAN.
IN 1787 THE FORT
WAS DEMOLISHED
AND THE GOVERNMENT HOUSE BUILT UPON THIS SITE

This was the starting-point of the Dutch West India Co. settlement which gradually became New York. In 1614 a stockade, called Fort Manhattan, was built as a temporary place of shelter for representatives of the United New Netherland Co., which had been formed to trade with the Indians. This company was replaced by the Dutch West India Co., with chartered rights to trade on the American coast, and the first step towards the forming of a permanent settlement was the building of Fort Amsterdam on the site of the stockade.



Fort Amsterdam. Nieuw Nederlandt. Henry R. Robinson, lithographer. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, NYPL Digital Collections.

In 1664 New Amsterdam passed into British possession and became New York, while Fort Amsterdam became Fort James. Under Queen Anne it was Fort George, remaining so until demolished in 1787.

On the Fort's site was built the Government House, intended for Washington and the Presidents who should follow him. But none ever occupied it as the seat of government was removed to Philadelphia before the house was completed. After 1801 it became an office building, and was demolished in 1815 to make room for the present structures.

Bowling Green

The tiny patch of grass at the starting-point of Broadway, now called Bowling Green Park, was originally the centre of sports for colonists, and has been the scene of many stirring events. The iron railing which now surrounds it was set up in 1771, having been imported from England to enclose a lead equestrian statue of King George III. On the posts of the fence were representations of heads of members of the Royal family. In 1776, during the Revolution, the statue was dragged down and molded into bullets, and where the iron heads were knocked from the posts the fracture can still be seen.

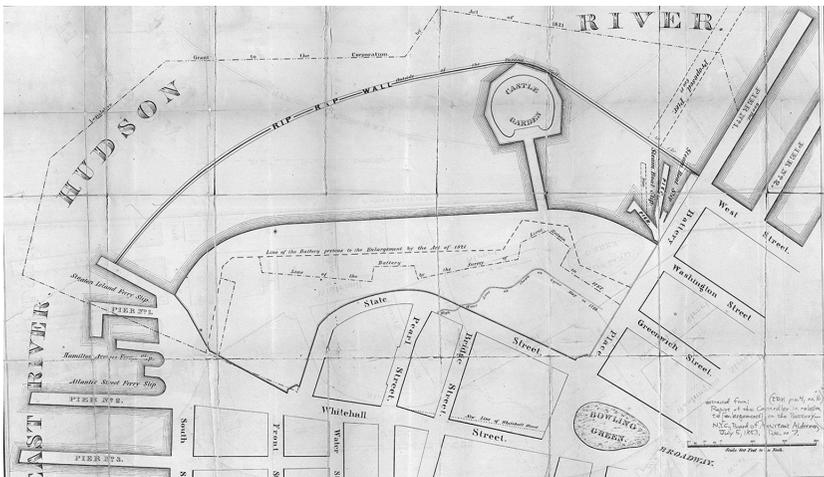
The Battery

When the English took possession of the city, in 1664, the Fort being regarded as useless, it was decided to build a Battery to protect the newly acquired possession. Thus the idea of the Battery was conceived, although the work was not actually carried out until 1684.

Beyond the Fort there was a fringe of land with the water reaching to a point within a line drawn from Water and Whitehall Streets to Greenwich Street. Sixty years after the Battery was built fifty guns were added, it having been lightly armed up to that time. The Battery was demolished about the same time as the Fort. The land on which it stood became a small park, retaining the name of the Battery, and was gradually added to until it became the Battery Park of to-day.

Castle Garden

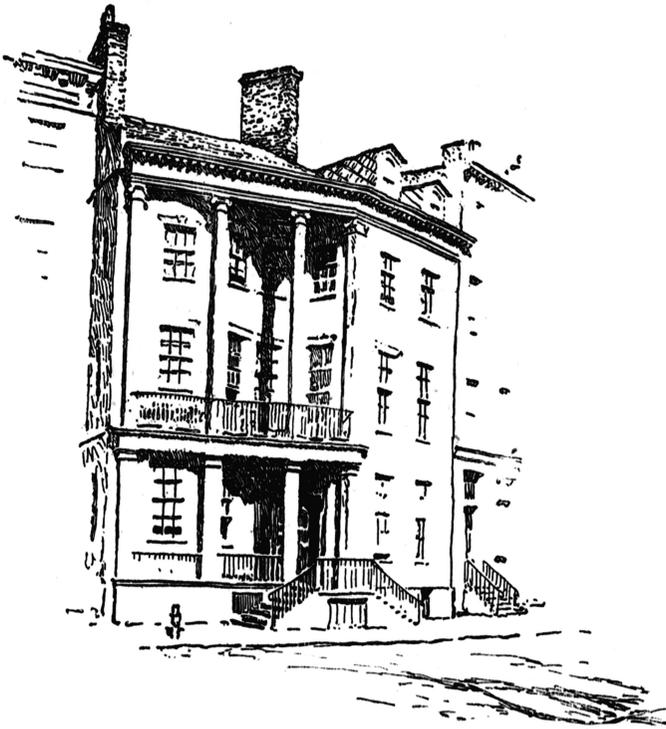
A small island, two hundred feet off the Battery, to which it was connected by a drawbridge, was fortified in 1811 and called Fort Clinton. The armament was twenty-eight 32 -pounders, none of which was ever fired at an enemy. In 1822 the island was ceded back to the city by the Federal Government—when the military headquarters were transferred to Governor’s Island and became a place of amusement under the name of Castle Garden. It was the first real home of opera in America. General Lafayette was received there in 1824, and there Samuel F. B. Morse first demonstrated the possibility of controlling an electric current in 1835. Jenny Lind, under the management of P. T. Barnum, appeared there in 1850. In 1855 it became a depot for the reception of immigrants; in 1890 the offices were removed to Ellis Island, and in 1896, after many postponements, Castle Garden was opened as a public aquarium.



Map of the Bowery, 1853. Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, NYPL Digital Collections.

State Street

State Street, facing the Battery, during the latter part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century, was the fashionable quarter of the city, and on it were the homes of the wealthy. Several of the old houses still survive. No. 7, now a home for immigrant Irish girls, was the most conspicuous on the street, and is in about its original state. At No. 9 lived John Morton, called the “rebel banker” by the British, because he loaned large sums to the Continental Congress. His son, General Jacob Morton, occupied the mansion after his marriage in 1791, and commanded the militia. Long after he became too infirm to actually command, from the balcony of his home he reviewed on the Battery parade grounds the Tompkins Blues and the Light Guards. The veterans of these commands, by legislative enactment in 1868, were incorporated as the “Old Guard.”



No 7 State Street

The “Stadhuis”

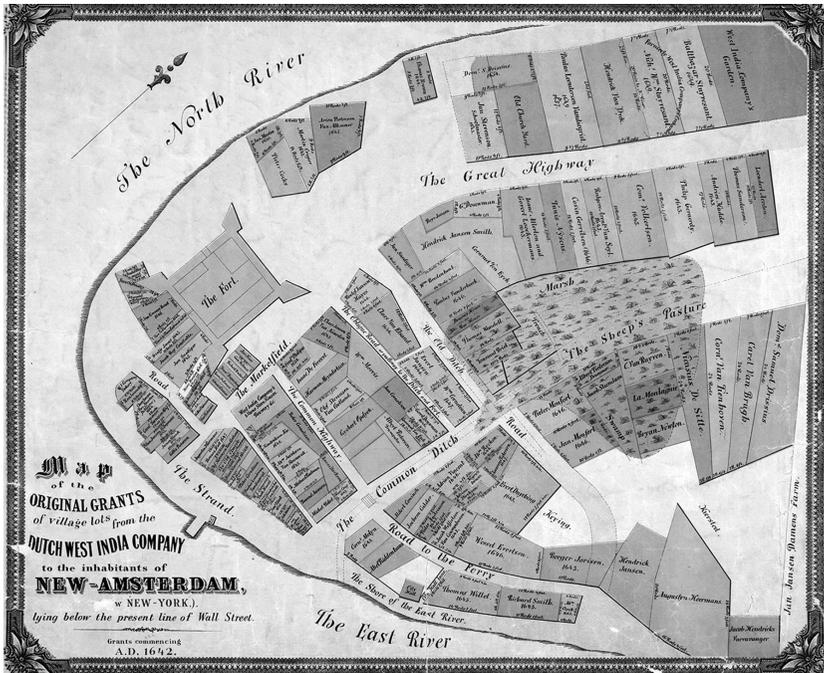
On the building at 4 and 6 Pearl Street, corner State Street, is a tablet which reads:



It was set up October 7, 1897, and marks the supposed site of the first City Hall. What is claimed by most authorities to be the real site is at Pearl Street, opposite Coenties Slip.

Whitehall Street was one of the earliest thoroughfares of the city, and was originally the open space left on the land side of the Fort.

Beaver Street was first called the Beaver’s Path. It was a ditch, on either side of which was a path. When houses were built along these paths they were improved by a rough pavement. At the end of the Beaver’s Path, close to where Broad Street is now, was a swamp, which, before the pavements were made, had been reclaimed and was known as the Sheep Pasture.



Map of the original land grants from the Dutch West India Company to the inhabitants of New-Amsterdam, showing the sheep pasture and other early locations. Henry Dunreath Tyler, cartographer. Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, NYPL Digital Collections.

Petticoat Lane

Marketfield Street, whose length is less than a block, opens into Broad Street at no. 72, a few feet from Beaver Street. This is one of the lost thoroughfares of the city. Almost as old as the city itself, it once extended past the Fort and continued to the river in what is now Battery Place. It was then called Petticoat Lane. The first French Huguenot church was built on it in 1688. Now the Produce Exchange cuts the street off short and covers the site of the church.

Broad Street

Through Broad Street, when the town was New Amsterdam, a narrow, ill-smelling inlet extended to about the present Beaver Street, then narrowed to a ditch close to Wall Street. The waterfront was then at Pearl Street. Several bridges crossed the inlet, the largest at the point where Stone Street is. Another gave Bridge Street its name. In 1660 the ways on either side were paved, and

soon became a market-place for citizens who traded with farmers for their products, and with the Indians who navigated the inlet in their canoes.

The locality has ever since been a centre of exchange. When the inlet was finally filled in it left the present "Broad" Street.

Where Beaver Street crosses this thoroughfare, on the northwest corner, is a tablet:

TO COMMEMORATE THE GALLANT AND PATRIOTIC
ACT OF MARINUS WILLIT IN HERE SEIZING
JUNE, 6, 1775, FROM THE BRITISH FORCES THE
MUSKETS WITH WHICH HE ARMED HIS
TROOPS. THIS TABLE IS ERECTED BY
THE SOCIETY OF THE SONS OF THE
REVOLUTION, NEW YORK, NOV. 12, 1892

On one side of the tablet is a bas-relief of the scene showing the patriots stopping the ammunition wagons.

Fraunces Tavern



Fraunces Tavern, standing at the southeast corner of Broad and Pearl Streets, is much the same outwardly as it was when built in 1700, except that it has two added stories. Etienne De Lancey, a Huguenot nobleman, built it as his homestead and occupied it for a quarter of a century. It became a tavern under the direction of Samuel Fraunces in 1762. It was Washington's headquarters in 1776, and in 1783 he delivered there his farewell address to his generals.

Pearl Street

Pearl Street was one of the two early roads leading from the Fort. It lay along the water front, and extended to a ferry where Peck Slip is now. The road afterwards became Great Queen Street, and was lined with shops of store-keepers who sought the Long Island trade. The other road in time became Broadway.

On a building at 73 Pearl Street, facing Coenties Slip, is a tablet which reads:

THE SITE OF THE
FIRST DUTCH HOUSE OF ENTERTAINMENT
ON THE ISLAND OF MANHATTAN
LATER THE SITE OF THE OLD "STADT HUYS"
OR CITY HALL
THIS TABLE IS PLACED HERE BY
THE HOLLAND SOCIETY OF NEW YORK
SEPTEMBER, 1890

The First City Hall

This is the site of the first City Hall of New Amsterdam, built 1642. It stood by the waterside, for beyond Water Street all the land has been reclaimed. There was a court room and a prison in the building. Before it, where the pillars of the elevated road are now, was a cage and a whipping-post. There was also the public "Well of William Cox."

Beside the house ran a lane. It is there yet, still called Coenties Lane as in the days of old. But it is no longer green. Now it is narrow, paved, and almost lost between tall buildings.



Coenties Slip. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, NYPL Digital Collections, New York Public Library.

Opposite Coenties Lane is Coenties Slip, which was an inlet in the days of the Stadt Huys. The land about was owned by Conraet Ten Eyck, who was nicknamed Coentje. This in time became Coonchy and was finally vulgarized to “Quincy.” The filling in of this waterway began in 1835 and the slip is now buried beneath Jeanette Park. The filled-in slip accounts for the width of the street. For the same reason there is considerable width at Wall, Maiden Lane and other streets leading to the water front.

First Printing Press in the Colony

At 81 Pearl Street, close by Coenties Slip, the first printing-press was set up by William Bradford, after he was appointed Public Printer in 1693. A tablet marks the site, with the inscription:

ON THIS SITE
WILLIAM BRADFORD
APPOINTED
PUBLIC PRINTER
APRIL 10, A.D. 1693
ESTABLISHED THE FIRST
PRINTING PRESS
IN THE
COLONY OF NEW YORK
ERECTED BY THE
NEW YORK
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
APRIL, 10, A. D. 1893
IN COMMEMORATION OF
THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE INTRODUCTION
OF PRINTING IN
NEW YORK

Fire of 1835

Across the way, on a warehouse at 88 Pearl Street, is a marble tablet of unique design, to commemorate the great fire of 1835, which started in Merchant Street, burned for nineteen hours, extended over fifty acres and consumed 402 buildings.

Directly through the block from this point is Cuyler's Alley, a narrow way between the houses running off Water Street. Although it is a hundred years old the only incident connected with its existence that has crept into the city's history, is a murder. In 1823, a Boston merchant was waylaid and murdered for his money, and was dragged through this street for final disposition in the river, but the murderer made so much noise in his work that the constable heard him and came upon the abandoned corpse.

Stone Street

Through a pretty garden at the back of the Stadt Huys, Stone Street was reached. It was the first street to be laid with cobble-stones (1657), and so came by its name, which originally had been Brouwer Street.

Delmonico's establishment at Beaver and William Streets is on the site of the second of the Delmonico restaurants. (See Fulton and William Streets.)

Flat and Barrack Hill

Exchange Place took its name from the Merchants' Exchange, which was completed in William Street, fronting on Wall, in 1827 (the present Custom House). Before that date it had been called Garden Street. From Hanover to Broad Street was a famous place for boys to coast in winter, and the grade was called "Flat and Barrack Hill." Scarcely more than an alley now, the street was even narrower once and was given its present width in 1832.

Wall Street

Wall Street came by its name naturally, for it was a walled street once. When war broke out between England and Holland in 1653, Governor Peter Stuyvesant built the wall along the line of the present street, from river to river. His object was to form a barrier that should enclose the city. It was a wall of wood, twelve feet high, with a sloping breastwork inside. After the wall was removed in 1699, the street came to be a chief business thoroughfare.

Federal Hall



Federal Hall as it appeared in 1797. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

A new City Hall, to replace the Stadt Huys, was built in 1699, at Nassau Street, on the site of the present Sub-Treasury building. In front of the building was the cage for criminals, stocks and whipping-post. When independence was declared, this building was converted into a capitol and was called Federal Hall. The Declaration of Independence was read from the steps in 1776. President Washington was inaugurated there in 1789. The wide strip of pavement on the west side of Nassau Street at Wall Street bears evidence of the former existence of Federal Hall. The latter extended across to the western house line of the present Nassau Street, and so closed the thoroughfare that a passage-way led around the building to Nassau Street.

When the Sub-Treasury was built in 1836, on the site of Federal Hall, Nassau Street was opened to Wall, and the little passage-way was left to form the wide pavement of to-day.

Where Alexander Hamilton Lived

Alexander Hamilton, in 1789, lived in a house on the south side of Wall Street at Broad. His slayer, Aaron Burr, then lived back of Federal Hall in Nassau Street.

The Custom House at William Street and Wall was completed in 1842. At this same corner once stood a statue of William Pitt, Earl of Chatham. In 1776, during the Revolution, the statue was pulled down by British soldiers, the head cut off and the remainder dragged in the mud. The people petitioned the Assembly in 1766 to erect the statue to Pitt, as a recognition of his zealous defence of the American colonies and his efforts in securing the repeal of the Stamp Act. At the same time provision was made for the erection of the equestrian statue of George III in Bowling Green. The statue of Pitt was of marble, and was erected in 1770.

Tontine Coffee House

The Tontine Building at the northwest corner of Wall and Water Streets marks the site of the Tontine Coffee House, a celebrated house for the interchange of goods and of ideas, and a political centre. It was a prominent institution in the city, resorted to by the wealthy and influential. The

building was erected in 1794, and conducted by the Tontine Society of two hundred and three members, each holding a \$200 share. Under their plan all property was to revert to seven survivors of the original subscribers. The division was made in 1876.

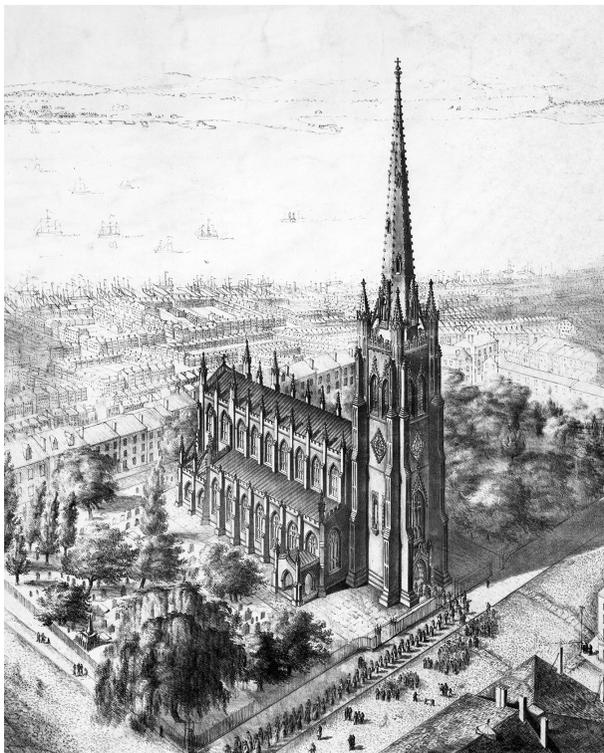


The Tontine Coffee House, Wall and Water Streets, about 1797. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

Meal Market

Close to where the coffee house was built later, a market was set up in the middle of Wall Street in 1709, and being the public market for the sale of corn and meal was called the “Meal Market.” Cut meat was not sold there until 1740. In 1731 this market became the only public place for the sale and hiring of slaves.

Trinity Church has stood at the head of Wall Street since 1697. Before 1779 the street was filled with tall trees, but during the intensely cold winter of that year most of them were cut down and used for kindling.

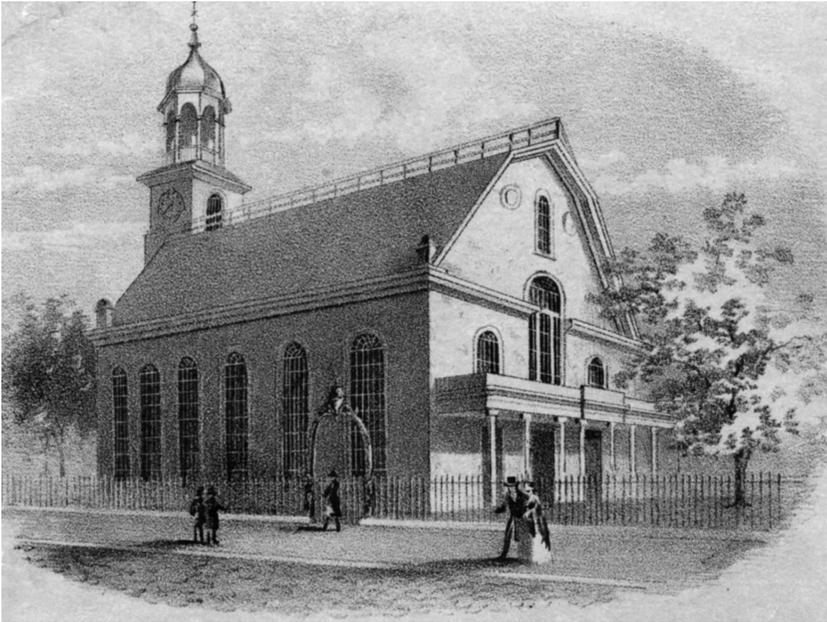


Birds-eye view of Trinity Church, New York, 1846. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC.

The ferry wharf has been at the foot of the street since 1694, when the water came up as far as Pearl Street. It was here that Washington landed, coming from Elizabethport after his journey from Virginia, April 23, 1789, to be inaugurated.

The United States Hotel, Fulton, between Water and Pearl Streets, was built in 1823 as Holt's Hotel. It was the headquarters for captains of whaling ships and merchants. A semaphore, or marine telegraph, was on the cupola, the windmill-like arms of which served to indicate the arrival of vessels.

Middle Dutch Church



Middle Dutch Church, corner Nassau and Cedar Sts. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, NYPL Digital Collections.

On the building at the northeast corner of Nassau and Cedar Streets is a tablet reading:

HERE STOOD
THE MIDDLE DUTCH CHURCH
DEDICATED A. D. 1729
MADE A BRITISH MILITARY PRISON 1776
RESTORED 1790
OCCUPIED AS THE UNITED STATES POST-OFFICE
1845-1875
TAKEN DOWN 1882

This church was a notable place of worship; the last in the city to represent strict simplicity of religious service as contrasted with modern ease and elegance. The post-office occupied the building until its removal to the structure it now occupies. The second home of the Middle Dutch Church was in Lafayette Place.

Pie Woman's Lane

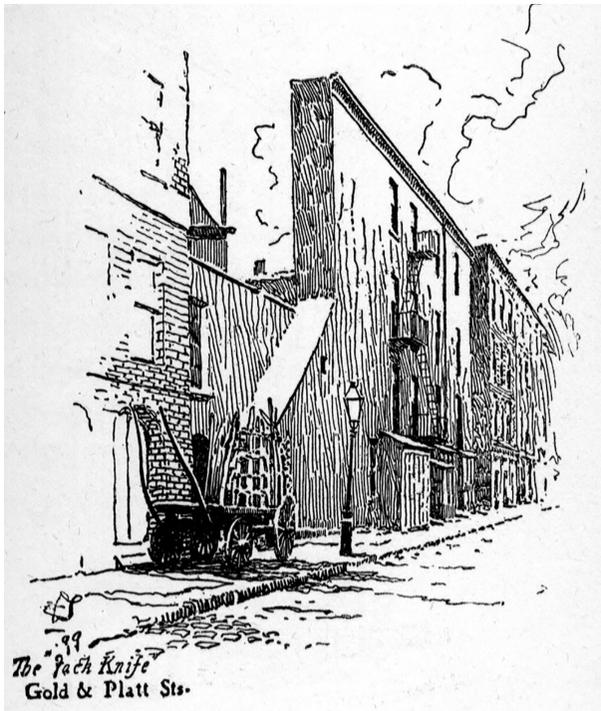
Nassau Street was opened in 1696, when Teunis de Kay was given the right to make a cartway from the wall to the commons (now City Hall Park). At first the street was known as Pie Woman's Lane.

The Maiden's Lane

Where Maiden Lane is there was once a narrow stream of spring water, which flowed from about the present Nassau Street. Women went there to wash their clothing, so that it came to be called the Virgin's Path, and from that the Maiden's Lane. A blacksmith having set up a shop at the edge of the stream near the river, the locality took the name of Smit's V'lei, or the Smith's Valley, afterwards shortened to the V'lei, and then readily corrupted to "Fly." It was natural, then, when a market was built on the Maiden's Lane, from Pearl to South Streets, to call it the Fly Market. This was pulled down in 1823.

The Jack-Knife

On Gold Street, northwest corner of Platt Street, is a wedge-shaped house of curious appearance. It is best seen from the Platt Street side. When this street was opened in 1834 by Jacob S. Platt, who owned much of the neighboring land and wanted a street of his own, the house was large and square and had been a tavern for a great many years. The new street cut the house to its present strange shape, and it came to be called the "Jack-knife."



Golden Hill

Golden Hill, celebrated since the time of the Dutch, is still to be seen in the high ground around Cliff and Gold Streets. Pearl Street near John shows a sweeping curve where it circled around the hill's base, and the same sort of curve is seen in Maiden Lane on the south and Fulton Street on the north. The first blood of the Revolution was shed on this hill in January, 1770, after the British soldiers had cut down a liberty pole set up by the Liberty Boys. The fight occurred on open ground back of an inn which still stands at 122 William Street, and is commemorated in a tablet on the wall of a building at the corner of John and William Streets. It reads:

“GOLDEN HILL”
HERE, JAN. 18, 1770
THE FIGHT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE
“SONS OF LIBERTY” AND THE
BRITISH REGULARS, 16TH FOOT
FIRST BLOODSHED IN THE
WAR OF THE REVOLUTION

The inn is much the same as in early days, except that many buildings crowd about it now, and modern paint has made it hideous to antiquarian eyes.



Golden Hill Inn

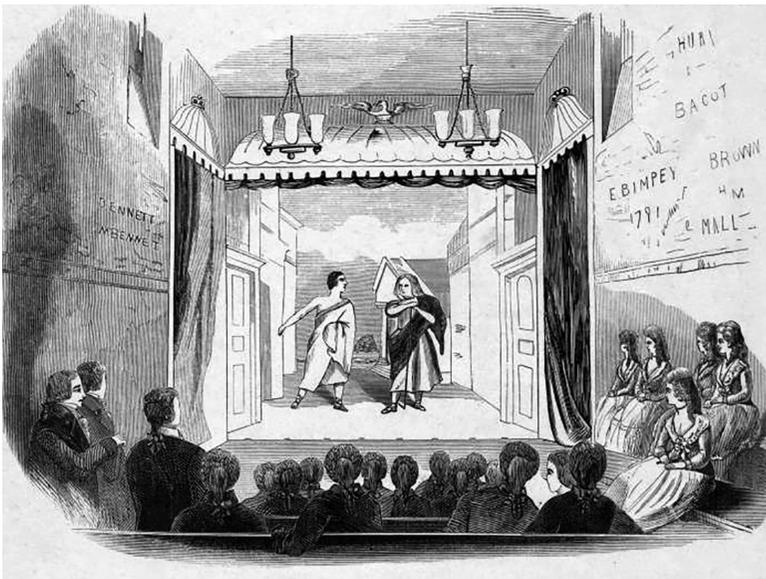
Delmonico's

On the east side of William Street, a few doors south of Fulton, John Delmonico opened a dingy little bake shop in 1823, acted as chef and waiter, and built up the name and business which to-day is synonymous with good eating. In 1832 he removed to 23 William Street. Burned out there in 1835, he soon opened on a larger scale with his brother at William and Beaver Streets, on which site is still an establishment under the Delmonico name. In time he set up various places—at Chambers Street and Broadway; Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue; Twenty-sixth Street and Broadway, and finally at Forty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue.

John Street Church

John Street Church, between Nassau and William Streets, was the first Methodist Church in America. In 1767 it was organized in a loft at 120 William Street, then locally known as Horse and Cart Street. In 1768 the church was built in John Street. It was rebuilt in 1817 and again 1841. John Street perpetuates the name of John Harpendingh, who owned most of the land thereabout.

John Street Theatre



Interior of the John St. Theatre. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, NYPL Digital Collections.

At what is now 17, 19 and 21 John Street, in 1767 was built the old John Street Theatre, a wooden structure, painted red, standing sixty feet back from the street and reached by a covered way. An arcade through the house at No. 17 still bears evidence of the theatre. The house was closed in 1774, when the Continental Congress recommended suspension of amusements. Throughout the Revolutionary War, however, performances were given, the places of the players being filled by British officers. Washington frequently attended the performances at this theatre after he became President. The house was torn down in 1798.

Shakespeare Tavern

The site of the Shakespeare Tavern is marked by a tablet at the southwest corner of Nassau and Fulton Streets. The words of the tablet are:

ON THIS SITE IN THE
OLD SHAKESPEARE TAVERN
WAS ORGANIZED
THE SEVENTH REGIMENT
NATIONAL GUARD, S.N.Y.
AUG. 25, 1824

This tavern, low, old-fashioned, built of small yellow bricks with dormer windows in the roof, was constructed before the Revolution. In 1808 it was bought by Thomas Hodgkinson, an actor, and was henceforth a meeting-place for Thespians. It was resorted to—in contrast to the business men guests of the Tontine Coffee House—by the wits of the day, the poets and the writers. In 1824 Hodgkinson died, and the house was kept up for a time by his son-in-law; Mr. Stoneall.