

THE NEW NEIGHBOR A Salute from Rye

by Goddard Light

Editor's Note: The observance of the 300th anniversary of the founding of Rye in 1660 resulted in some interesting research by historically-minded residents and a principal contributor in articles appearing in The Rye Chronicle was Goddard Light. Since that time our neighboring Village of Mamaroneck reached the same milestone in its history and Mr. Light has delved again into the early records to find there was a close relationship between the two communities. We are indebted to him for the following article.)

On September 23rd last, historically minded people in Mamaroneck dedicated a monument to their founder, John Richbell. Since that date marked the 300th anniversary of the founding of that neighboring community, it might be of interest for us here to see just how this event was to effect our own history.

In an age when people frequently don't even know their next door neighbors, it might come as a surprise to discover that John Richbell was well known to the men who had first settled Manursing Island the year before, but such is the case. In fact, the very first chapter in the Mamaroneck story happened on "Peter Disbrow's Island"—namely Manursing Island—namely Rye.

It was here that John Richbell came on September 23rd, 1661 from Oyster Bay, Long Island. At Peter Disbrow's house he met with the Indian sagamore, Wappaquewam, and arranged to purchase the entire area from the Mamaroneck River to Mr. Pell's purchase in Pelham, paying him two shirts and ten shillings in wampum as an evidence of good faith. The actual purchase price of 100 fathoms of wampum, 22 coats and a multitude of additional clothing, firearms and farm implements was to be paid: half within a month, the balance the following spring.

This purchase was done with great secrecy in order to forestall trouble from others who, hearing of Richbell's intent, might try to get in ahead of him. But the news leaked out. Thomas Close, one of two Manursing Island sailors, was in Oyster Bay late in September, 1661. He got into conversation with John Finch who had accompanied Richbell at the time of the

purchase. For some unexplained reason, Finch told Close what had transpired and "desired him not to discover what he had been told," but no sooner had Close returned to Manursing Island than he told his friend, William Jones, age 22 and likewise a sailor; and very shortly he had sufficiently forgotten his scruples to discuss the matter with still others including a Mr. Thomas Revell, sometime resident of Barbadoes, West Indies, but, for the moment at least, living on Manursing Island.

Meanwhile, in November 1661, Richbell and Finch again crossed over from Oyster Bay—this time to the Mamaroneck River—where, by prearrangement, they were to meet the Indians and make the first half payment.

They waited. No Indians appeared. They built "a shed to shelter them from the weather" and spent the night—the first building by a white man to be put up in this area. It was cold. The next day there were still no Indians, their food ran out. They sent to Manursing Island and young Jones sailed over with some bread. Jones told them the startling news that the Indians they sought were on Manursing Island and that, at this very moment, Mr. Thomas Revell was treating with them to buy the same land for which Richbell had contracted in September. Richbell and Finch jumped into the boat and arrived on Manursing Island just in time to catch Wappaquewam and Cockoo the Indian trying to sneak away without talking to them. Seeing them from a distance, John Finch called out, "Are you ashamed of what you are doing?" At this the Indians stopped and agreed to go with Richbell and Finch to Peter Disbrow's home. There they discovered from Peter Disbrow that he had tried to stop the Indians from dealing with Thomas Revell but to no avail.

Wappaquewam now acknowledged that the other Indians overpersuaded him to sell to Mr. Revell, because he would give a great deal more.

And thus the matter stood until March of the following year, when, Revell still persisting in his claim, John Richbell appealed to Peter Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam, who after considering the matter for some time finally, on May 6,

1662, signed a ground brief giving Richbell complete title to the lands he had purchased. That would seem to have settled the matter. But in 1664 the British moved in and took over New Netherlands, and the persistent Mr. Revell saw his opportunity to reopen the issue. Since Richbell had thrown his allegiance to the Dutch at a time when the men of Rye and other Englishmen up and down Long Island Sound had declared for New England, it seemed that Revell might now have a chance.

To support his claim he brought to the provincial capital, which had now been renamed New York, a deed drawn up at John Coe's house on Manursing Island, signed by Cuckoo, the Indian, on October 27, 1661 and witnessed by John Budd, John Coe, Thomas Studwell (three of the founders of Rye) and by the seaman, Thomas Close. For his part, John Richbell produced dispositions signed by Peter Disbrow, the remaining founder of Rye, and the young seaman, William Jones, plus five or six others who had been privy to this affair.

To substantiate Cuckoo, the Indian's, right to act in this matter, Revell produced a power of attorney made out to Cuckoo and signed by Wappaquewam, and again witnessed by the above gentlemen of Manursing Island—but, strangely, this power of attorney was dated November 11, 1661, two weeks after the signing of the deed on which it purported to give Cockoo power of action. If this wasn't enough to finish Revell's claim, the following additional matters came out at this time.

Wappaquewam confessed that though Mr. Richbell had contracted with him first, the wily Cockoo and the seaman, Thomas Close, had spoken "with him to set his hand to Mr. Revell's deed and he should have a coat", which he did.

Wappaquewam tried to excuse himself by saying that despite Richbell's prior claim, he came "without goods", and when time went by without them, he sold the land to Mr. Revell.

Another Indian testified that Cockoo and Thomas Close had received Mr. Revell's money and divided it between them without sending any to the rightful Indian proprietors.

From all this it would appear that Cuckoo and Thomas Close were, the real villains in this little drama.

The English governor, Lovelace, confirmed Richbell's patent on October 16, 1666, and that ended Mr. Thomas Revell.

By this time Thomas Close had long since disappeared from the



John R. Dunning

scene. But Cuckoo stayed around for quite a while. His name was still appearing on land deeds in Rye as late as 1680. One imagines him as a sly, crafty but, perhaps, not unlikeable rascal, of whom the Rye settlers became rather fond.

And what about the founders? Well, by 1680, in Rye all but Peter Disbrow were gone. John Budd died in 1670 and even before that both John Coe and Thomas Studwell had left, Studwell to Stamford and Coe back to Newtown, Long Island.

John Richbell lived out his days in Mamaroneck, the town which he had founded. In 1684, the year of his death, came the great Richbell vs. Rye controversy, but, on this happy occasion all past differences should be forgotten. And so—A salute, neighbor, on your 300th Anniversary.

(Many of the sources and all of the direct quotes for this article are to be found in documents re-

Dunning Takes Course in U.S. Aircraft Mechanics

LACKLAND AFB, Tex. — Airman Basic John R. Dunning, son of Mr. and Mrs. John R. Dunning, Ann Lane, Rye, N. Y., is being assigned to the United States Air Force technical training course for aircraft mechanics at Amarillo AFB, Tex.

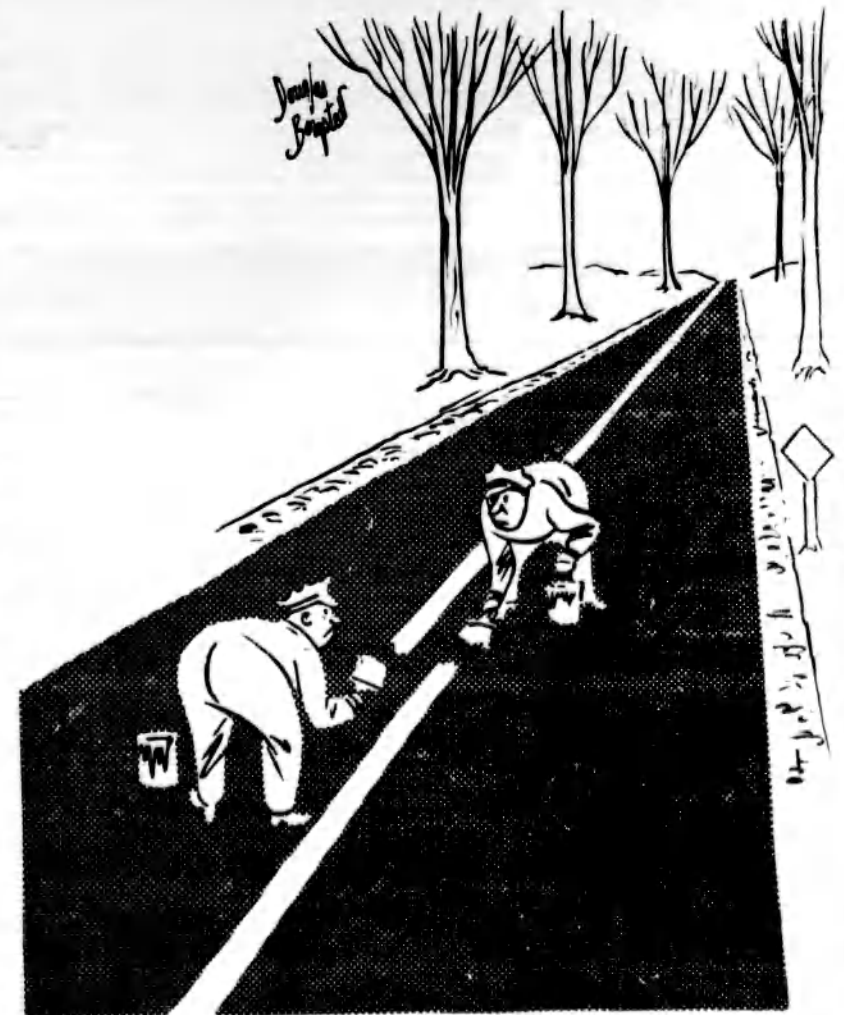
Airman Dunning, who has completed his basic military training at Lackland AFB, Tex., was selected for the advanced training on the basis of his interests and aptitudes.

He was graduated from Rye High School.

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