

LEGENDS
OF THE
SHAWANGUNK

(SHON-GUM)

AND ITS ENVIRONS,

INCLUDING

HISTORICAL SKETCHES, BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES,
AND THRILLING BORDER INCIDENTS AND ADVENTURES

RELATING TO THOSE PORTIONS OF

THE COUNTIES OF ORANGE, ULSTER AND SULLIVAN

LYING IN THE SHAWANGUNK REGION.

ILLUSTRATED BY

NUMEROUS ENGRAVINGS AND PEN SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR.

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"ACADIA: A LOST CHAPTER IN AMERICAN HISTORY"; "THE GREEN MOUNTAIN BOYS: or, VERMONT
AND THE NEW YORK LAND JOBBERS"; "HISTORY OF DUCHESS COUNTY";
"THE STATESMEN OF PODUNK"; ETC., ETC.

1887

THE DUBOIS HOMESTEAD.

AN early settler and patentee of Orange county, and one who figured quite largely in events pertaining to the frontier history of what is now Montgomery township, was Henry Wileman, an Irishman by birth, and a man of many sterling qualities. He was the proprietor of a tract of 3000 acres granted him in 1709; the estate was located on the east bank of the Walkill, below the village of Walden. His name appears on the records as a member of St. Andrew's church, as early as 1733. A church edifice constructed of logs, that had been built on his land for the use of the society, was standing in 1775.

Wileman was a free-liver, noble, and generous to a fault. He built his log palace on the site where afterward stood the DuBois homestead, of Revolutionary fame. It was a beautiful location: the soil was fine, and the patentee of 3000 acres entertained right royally. His convivial propensities frequently carried him to excess, and, if tradition is to be credited, the revelries in the Wileman log house were notorious through the country round.

In process of time Henry Wileman died, and it was meet that he should be buried as became a patentee of 3000 acres. It does not appear that he ever married; or that any relative had ever followed him to this distant clime. But the rich, when they die, never lack for mourners, or at least those who outwardly affect great sorrow for their death. So it came to pass that the friends of Wileman arranged to have the burial take place with all the pomp and splendor and outward tokens of regard for his memory that should characterize the funeral solemnities of a great man, according to the notions and customs of those early times.

It was then the prevailing usage to furnish liquor on all such occasions. No funeral was complete without it. They would sooner think of doing without the sermon than without the rum. As Wileman died possessed of his thousands of acres, it would be a lasting disgrace to limit the supply of liquor when celebrating his obsequies. The cellar was stored with the choicest wines; what could be more appropriate, or what could better voice the public sorrow, than that these wines should be drawn forth and made to do duty in assisting in the giving of suitable honors to the memory of their late owner!

In short, the people, young and old, were urged to drink. If any were backward, they were chided for their lack of respect for the memory of the departed, whose obsequies they were then observing; and the wine was handed round when they could not well help themselves.

At length the hour came in which the funeral cortege was to move from

remains of the deceased, the bier carriers, mourners, friends and neighbors in attendance, started on foot to the little burial-place behind the log church, where the open grave awaited its tenant.

But the people had undertaken a greater task than they could accomplish. Overcome by the intensity of their sorrow, or by their too frequent and long-continued libations of the contents of the wine-cellar, the friends, mourners, and finally the bearers, one by one fell out by the way, either to sink insensible into the highway, or to make their way homeward as best they could.

In short, the corpse was let down in the road before they had proceeded half way to the grave, and there abandoned.

Among that number there was one sober enough to realize that the dead ought not to be left unburied, and that it savored too much of irreverence to leave the corpse unattended in the middle of the road. To convey the remains to the churchyard by his own unaided strength was simply impossible; it was no less impracticable to carry the coffin back to the house, and await a more favorable opportunity to complete the burial. Here was a quandary that would have puzzled the brain even of a soberer man. At last he hit upon a way out of the difficulty, and put the plan into immediate execution. He procured a shovel, and proceeded to dig a grave in the road by the side of the coffin; when he had dug to a sufficient depth he rolled the coffin over into it, and there covered up the mortal remains of the free and noble-hearted Irishman, the patentee of 3000 acres. With no monument to mark his last resting-place, this was all the sepulchre that was accorded him for many a long year.

By an alteration in the road the grave was thrown into an adjoining field; and when Mr. Peter Neaffie afterward excavated a cellar for a dwelling, he unexpectedly came upon the coffin and bones of Henry Wileman, and gave them a respectable burial.

The farm on which these occurrences took place was the property, at the time of the Revolution, of Peter DuBois, a British Tory and a refugee. In 1782 it was occupied by a detachment of the American army from the cantonment at New Windsor, sent here to protect some government property.

One cold, stormy night, late in October of that year, John McLean, afterward Commissary General of New York for a number of years, was sent from this encampment with papers for the Commander-in-Chief at Newburgh. At a point in the Shawangunk road where it crosses the Stony brook, McLean was waylaid, seized, taken from his horse, gagged, tied to a tree, and the papers removed from his custody. In this position he was left by the robbers to the chances of liberation by a possible traveler. He was relieved from his uncomfortable position early the next morning by a horseman who chanced that way, but he nearly perished from cold during the night. This accident, by bringing him into notice, contributed not a little to his subsequent political preferment.