

STORIES of New Jersey

By the time the group at Cockloft Hall sat down to write *SALMAGUNDI*, they had become quite accustomed to decorating the commonplace with strange names. Cockloft Hall really wasn't Cockloft Hall at all; that was only the name they used when they wrote about it in *SALMAGUNDI*. Properly known as Mount Pleasant it belonged to Gouverneur Kemble whose position as a wealthy country gentleman caused his guests to call him "The Patroon," after the old Dutch landowners along the Hudson.

These pleasure-loving New Yorkers were not content to be "The Club" or "The Boys," but grandly styled themselves "The Nine Worthies" or less grandly, "The Sad Dogs" or "The Lads of Kilkenny." Kilkenny, of course, referred to the legendary Irish cats who fought so vigorously that only their tails survived the fray. It may have been inspired by the spirited literary disputes among the "Worthies" or it may have been simply a name which caught their fancy.

Whatever the reason for Kilkenny, the alternate title "Nine Worthies" was, to say the least, inexact. There were usually a dozen or more men gathered to enjoy Kemble's hospitality at Cockloft Hall. Prominent among them was Irving's brother William, 17 years his senior and considerably older than most of the others; another brother, Peter, who had edited a paper in New York and was to be known for many years by his Cockloft nickname of "The Doctor," and James Kirke Paulding, William Irving's brother-in-law, a man of letters in his own right, and later Secretary of the Navy in Martin Van Buren's cabinet.

Irving's excursions to Mount Pleasant were made in the leisurely manner of the early 19th century. Often accompanied by Paulding and his brother William he crossed by ferry from the battery in New York to Paulus Hook (now Jersey City). At this busy stage-junction the trio boarded the Newark coach which carried them over the Hackensack River Bridge--built of wood only 12 years before--and on to the plank road stretching across the meadows. Gouverneur Kemble would meet the party at Archer Gifford's Tavern on Broad Street in Newark where they often lingered before setting out in his carriage for Mount Pleasant. They drove down the main street, past the town common (now Military Park), past Trinity Church, past the fine mansions that lined the thoroughfare. Shortly they were in the country, riding along a slope overlooking the quiet Passaic and the wooded ridge on the opposite shore. Slightly less than a mile from town was Mount Pleasant.

"It is pleasantly situated," Irving wrote of Cockloft Hall in *SALMAGUNDI*, "on the banks of a sweet pastoral stream; not so near town as to invite an inundation of idle acquaintance, who come to lounge away on an afternoon, nor so distant as to render it an absolute deed of charity or friendship to perform the journey." In front of the long two-storied mansion was a formal garden and at the rear a terraced lawn stepped gracefully down to the clear stream. On the shore stood an octagonal summer house and less than a hundred yards from the river itself, the last word in luxury, a private fish pond, installed by Isaac Gouverneur from whom Kemble had inherited the estate. A passage in *SALMAGUNDI* explains that although the river was well stocked with fish, the old gentleman felt that "there was nothing like having things to one's self."

Mount Pleasant had been built in 1750 by Nicholas Gouverneur whose tastes as a collector created an atmosphere well suited to the activities of "The Lads of Kilkenny." He had imported from the Orient the exotic furnishings and hang-