

Burnet Street May Return to Cornelius Vanderbilt Started Vast Fortune in Days When His H

By CLIFFORD B. ROSS

It seems positively chimerical that the present stock of yachting and horse-breeding Vanderbilt scions even remotely sprung from such humble surroundings as Burnet street or a wharf along the waterfront.

But they did!

Burnet street was a respectable thoroughfare back in the early years of the new nation which had just finished prosecuting a war on the high seas with its British cousins in 1812. And a few years later—around 1820—a precocious young blade in his teens, Cornelius Vanderbilt by name, made Burnet street his residence and the seat of his thriving ferry business.

New Brunswick Shipping Center

When "Cornel," or Commodore Vanderbilt as he was later known, was getting a start towards founding the vast fortune for future blue-bloods, Burnet street was a bustling business section. New Brunswick was a shipping center in those old days and the section down along the waterfront was a busy beehive teeming with trade from off the seven seas. Schooners docked along the wharves from all parts of the world. Black-skinned cargo from Africa, four-masted, shippers, merchants, seafront ofl, blue-jeaned seamen—all a colorful part of lower New Brunswick about a century ago.

Burnet street was not only a center of commercial activity, but it was a fine residential section as well. Many of the old New Brunswick families had homes in the section between Burnet and George streets.

With the passing of a century Burnet street and the lower section of town along the canal has deteriorated into what is now considered to be one of New Jersey's worst slums. The area bounded by Albany street, Bishop street, the Raritan River and Neilson street has been reported by the State Housing Authority as the worst slum area in New Jersey with the exception of those in Atlantic City and Newark.

Where once "Cornel" and his young wife settled to raise a family now consists of dirty streets, derelict houses, and a general unhealthy shabbiness. The old "Bellona" Hotel run by the Commodore's young wife in the prosperous days was nothing but a weathered derelict building when it was razed a few years ago.

Shades of Old Bellona

New Brunswick should vision shades of the past—the wealthy shipping mart of yesteryears—shades of the old "Bellona," of the old Citizens Line and the Union Line which raced as rivals for the steamboat traveling trade between New York and Philadelphia via New Brunswick, key city and stop-over town.

Turn back the pages of New Brunswick history, roll back the years, 100 or more, and look at the man who started on his fabulous career down on Burnet street along the river front. Vision Vanderbilt's New Brunswick.

terest in various staunch sailing vessels," writes Croft.

But steamboating had its inception when Robert Fulton launched his Clermont on the Hudson River. Cornelius recognized the future of steam in water transportation and astonished his friends by suddenly turning back on sails, abandoning his coasting business. He sold out his interest in half a dozen vessels, and looked around for a steamboat. That was in 1823.

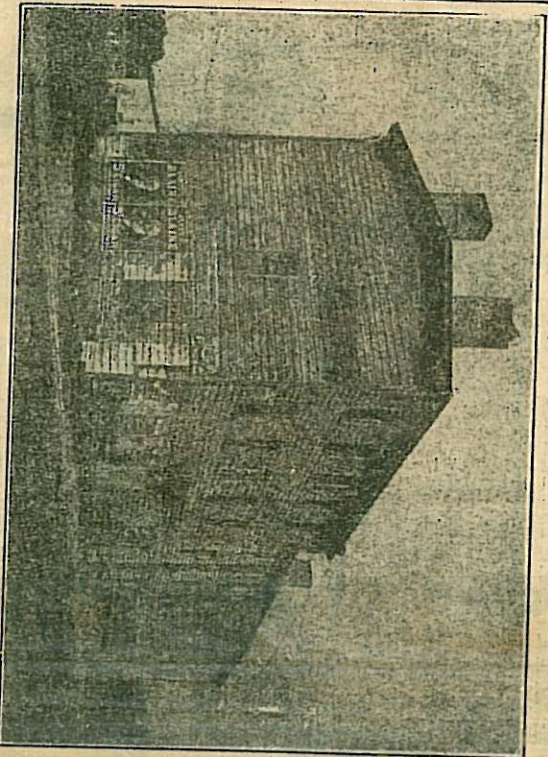
Wife Runs Bellona Hotel

Now while Cornelius had been saving his money in the freight and passenger service up the bay to New York and in the coasting business, his wife had been making a real success of a little hotel on Burnet street called the "Bellona."

"It was in the Bellona that Cornelius Vanderbilt laid the foundations of the family millions," says John P. Wall in his "Chronicles of New Brunswick." "The minutes of Common Council for July 19, 1822 read: "Cornelius Van Derbilt presented a petition praying license to keep a house of public entertainment for the ensuing year where he as present dwells, whose prayer was granted and his house assessed at \$12."

Her efficient management of the hostelry made it possible for the Commodore to launch on a steam vessel career. A historian wrote:

"The hotel at the foot of Burnet street was kept by Skipper Cornelius Vanderbilt, the late commander of steamboats and general of railroads. His wife kept clean and neat the house and attended to the boarders during the day, while her husband ran his 'perryrauger,' a sloop without a bowsprit, to New York. His ambitious mind yearned for a steamboat and when an opportunity to buy one was presented and he lacked the money, his wife, according to a story Judge Fisk, a great friend of Vanderbilt's, used to tell, surprised him with a considerable sum which she had, unknown to him, saved by economy in her management of the hotel."



The old Bellona Hotel pictured above was a famous New Brunswick hostelry managed by Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, wife of the "Commodore." Many travelers enroute to Philadelphia stopped over night here in the steamboat days. The building was razed in February 1906.

Suggestion for Rehabilitation

1. Demolition of all buildings on the easterly side of Burnet street, excepting the sewage disposal plant and such other buildings which may be preserved and converted to public use.
2. Conversion of that entire strip on the easterly side of Burnet street for a parkway with recreation and playground facilities.
3. Creation of a boulevard 80 to 100 feet in width with or without center parkway connecting Albany street and Sonomon's Hill.
4. Retention of the building line on the westerly side of Burnet street, increasing the width of the sidewalk.
5. Widening of several intersecting streets.
6. Careful planning and zoning of the entire area for residential and business uses.
7. Creation of such restrictions as may be desirable and in conformity with the general plan.
8. Demolishing those buildings which have outlived their usefulness, reconstructing and modernizing, and wherever possible using present structures.
9. Planning generally the creation of modern two, three, four and five-room apartments with advantageous landscaping, light and air facilities as well as business section in some parts.
10. Possible retention of some one-family structures which may be harmonized with the entire scheme.