

The Death and Burial of Harmen Janse Knickerbocker

Bryan & Howard Knickerbocker, 19 August 2021

For more details, see our data repository, knic.com

Also see the Knickerbocker Unified Tree. It is currently on Ancestry (and is soon coming to a free website)

This document will discuss Harmen Janse Knickerbocker's death and burial. We hope to clear up some confusion. (Many family trees contain misinformation.)

Summary

In 1718, Harmen Janse's widow was a taxpayer in Dutchess County. This proves that Harmen Janse was already dead. (The records were in a mix of Dutch and English. Wedwen = widow.)

1732, Peter Knickerbocker – son of Harmen Janse – sold his land that bordered the Hudson River. The deed included a description of where Harmen Janse died. This is absolute proof that Harmen Janse died in Dutchess County.

In 1733, Cornelius Knickerbocker – another son of Harmen Janse – sold his land along the Hudson. This deed included a description of where Harmen Janse was buried. This is absolute proof that Harmen Janse was buried in Dutchess County.

Harmen Janse Knickerbocker's Widow, Dutchess Co, 1718

I The Inhabitents Residents Sojourners and frieholders of Dutches County are Rated & assesed By ye assessors Chosen for ye Same the Day of Janury the 17. 1717/18 for ye North Ward Viz				
	L	L	s	d
1 Wedwen Van Harmen Kneckerbaker	20	00	18	9
2 Lowerens Knickerbaker	10	00	9	4½
3 Adam Van Alstyn	5	00	4	8¼
4 Barent Van Benthuysse	5	00	4	8¼

Land lying and being in Dutchess County

the undivided Land whereoof Harmen Janse Knickerbocker father of the said Pieter Knickerbocker died

... land lying and being in Dutchess County ...
... the undivided land where of Harmen Janse Knickerbocker father of the said Pieter Knickerbocker died ...

Land lying and being in the County of Dutchess

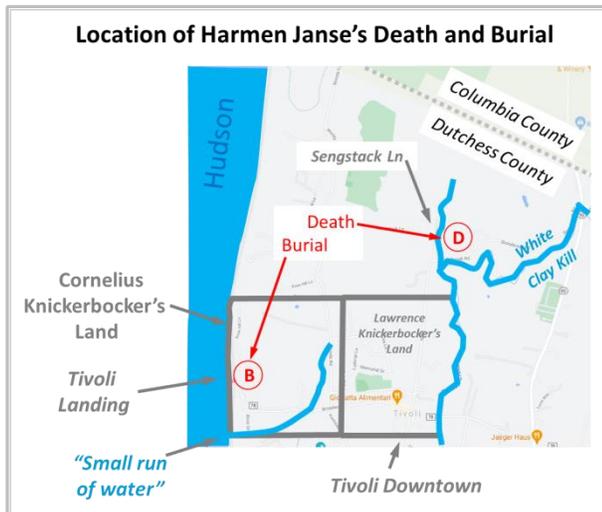
excepting and reserving

quarter of an acre of land for a Burying Place for the Knickerbocker how where the father of said Cornelius Knickerbocker lyes

... situate lying and being in the County of Dutchess ...
... excepting and reserving quarter of an acre of land for a burying place for the Knickerbocker where the father of said Cornelius Knickerbocker lyes

We're only on page 1, and we've already proven that Harmen Janse (a) was already dead in 1718; (b) died in Dutchess County, and (c) was buried in Dutchess County. This was easy.

Location of Harmen Janse's Death and Burial



The rest of this document is a more detailed discussion.

We will show several maps. Each map uses blue lines to show important waterways.

This map is a high level summary of the entire story. It includes the location of modern roads and landmarks to provide perspective.

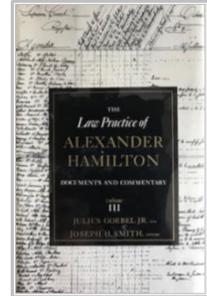
Harmen Janse died near the letter D on this map, near the intersection of today's Stoney Bank Road and Sengstack Lane.

Harmen Janse was buried near the letter B, just east of Tivoli Landing. The burial ground was set aside by his son Cornelius.

Key References

This report is based on historic records. The key records are:

Alexander Hamilton's legal records: Several Knickerbockers were witnesses in two major lawsuits. This is summarized in a book called *The Law Practice of Alexander Hamilton, Volume 3*. We will refer to this book as *LPAH*. This book is a goldmine.



These lawsuits had a very high profile. The lawyers included John Lansing (who helped write the U.S. Constitution), Alexander Hamilton (who helped write, and then signed, the Constitution), and Robert Livingston (who administered the oath of office to George Washington).

Land records: New York land records are well organized and are available on FamilySearch.

Unfortunately, land was often bought and sold based on a handshake. Even if there was a written deed, it was often stuffed into somebody's desk drawer. Many people didn't bother to register the purchase of their land until many years later when they sold the land.

(The Knickerbockers owned nine properties near Tivoli. This included the farms of Cornelius and Lawrence Knickerbocker, and also included seven other lots. The Knickerbockers sold all of this land in the mid 1700's. Most of the deeds were lost.)

To make matters worse, deeds were sometimes recorded in entirely the wrong county. The most important deeds in this story were recorded in Ulster County, the ancestral home of the Hoffmans. (We're willing to bet that the Ulster County clerk pocketed a fee for allowing the Hoffmans to avoid a trip to Poughkeepsie.)

Listed below are four important deeds. Three of them were recorded in Ulster County.

Year of sale	Parties	Location of the land	Where was the deed recorded (and when?)	Comment
1722	P. Schuyler & the Knickerbocker heirs	Dutchess County	Dutchess Co, 2 pg 398 (Recorded in 1754)	Subdivided the joint properties
1723	P. Schuyler & the Hoffmans		Ulster Co, CC pg 209 (Recorded in 1723)	Schuyler sold his lots
1732	Peter Knickerbocker & the Hoffmans		Ulster Co, EE pg 422 (Recorded in 1756)	Peter sold Lot 2
1733	Cornelius Knickerbocker & the Hoffmans		Ulster Co, EE pg 424 (Recorded in 1756)	Cornelius sold his farm

Local Histories: We will briefly mention information from several local histories. This includes Joseph H. Smith's *History of Dutchess County* (1882); Edward M. Smith's *History of Rhinebeck* (1881), and the Vasser Brother's Institute transcriptions of the *Book of the Supervisors of Dutchess Co N. Y. A.D. 1718-1722* (1909).

Vague information: Harmen Janse was somewhere in Dutchess County

It was hard to decide how to organize this document. We decided tell the story in two parts.

Part 1 of the story is the table shown below. This is a chronological list of a few interesting events. Each event is a small part of the overall story of Harmen Janse. However, the individual events – taken one at a time – are too vague to tell us exactly where Harmen Janse lived or died.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Comment</u>
1704	Harmen Janse bought land in Dutchess Co.	For example, see the map in the overleaf of the History of Rhinebeck	This is proven by many historic documents
1707	Robert Livingston reported seeing the footpath to Harmen Janse’s house	See the next section	Livingston’s notes are vague
1708	Harmen Janse “van Dutchess County” signed his will	For example, see knic.com	The original will (in Dutch) is available from many sources
1711	A surveyor reported seeing the footpath to Harmen Janse’s house	See next section	The surveyors provided Important details
1714	Harmen Janse paid taxes in Dutchess County	Smith, History of Dutchess County, p 60	Harmen Janse died no earlier than 1714
1714	Harmen Janse died in Dutchess County (according to his son)	Affidavit by Peter Knickerbocker. (LPAH pg 179)	Peter was 82 when testified that his father had died in 1714.
1718	His widow paid taxes in Dutchess County	Dutchess Co Book of the Supervisors, pg 3.	Harmen Janse died no later than 1718
1722	Peter Schuyler and the Knickerbocker heirs subdivided their lands in Dutchess County	See the next section	This is a very complicated deed
1732	Peter Knickerbocker sold his land along the Hudson to the Hoffmans		The deed mentioned the death of Harmen Janse
1733	Cornelius Knickerbocker sold his land along the Hudson to the Hoffmans		The deed mentioned both the death and the burial of Harmen Janse
1882	A local historian described a small abandoned burial ground with tombstones of Knickerbockers and Hoffmans		The burial ground was near Tivoli Landing, “behind the Farmer’s Hotel”

Now we will jump into Part 2: the gory details.

In the table above we have highlighted six key events in green. Each of the six key events will be discussed in the following pages.

Specific information about Harmen Janse's location

The following items – taken together – tell us where Harmen Janse lived, and where he died. The individual items are shown in chronological order.

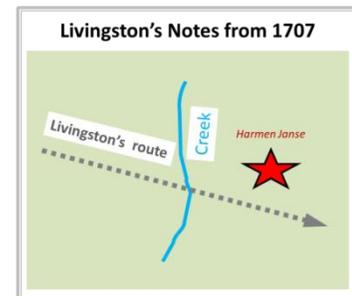
1707: Robert Livingston noticed Harmen Janse's footpath

Robert Livingston was the lord of Livingston Manor (which was later renamed Columbia County.) In 1707, Livingston and some colleagues took a four day journey through the wilderness. They started at the Hudson River and travelled east / southeast towards what is now called Mt. Ross.

Livingston recorded in his notes that he crossed the path to "Harme Janse Knickerbacker's place." The path was near a creek. (*LPAH* pg 56.)

Shown here is a very simple graphic. We have added a red star to indicate approximately where Harmen Janse must have lived, along a footpath, somewhere near a creek.

This is vague. For example, Livingston didn't specify whether the footpath was east or west of the creek. Nonetheless, this lays the groundwork for our story.



A footnote on page 56 of the *LPAH* book says that Livingston's handwritten notes still exist in the NY Historical Society in New York City. At some future date, we hope to visit NYC and review Livingston's notes for ourselves.

1711: Part of Harmen Janse's land was surveyed

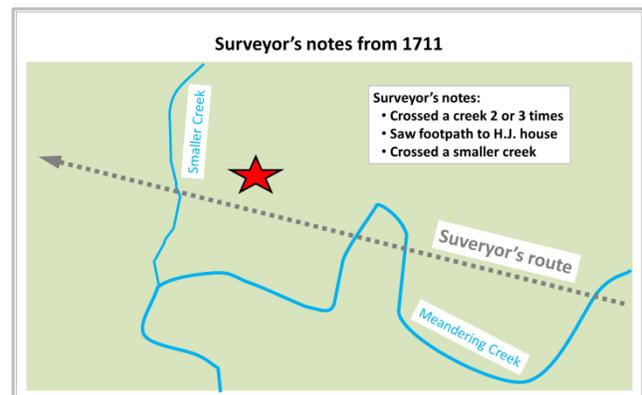
The Livingston family hired surveyors in 1711. The Livingstons were hoping to expand their land empire. Alexander Hamilton would later describe this as "a manifest fraud on the King." (*LPAH* pg 110.)

This was not a general survey of the area. The surveyors were only worried about establishing the border of Livingston Manor. They traversed a straight line, heading west / northwest towards the Hudson. The surveyors made a mistake, and wound up going directly through the land owned by Harmen Janse and Peter Schuyler. This helped spark the later lawsuits.

The surveyor's notes say that (1) they crossed a meandering creek "two or three times," then (2) saw the footpath to Harmen Janse's house, then (3) crossed another small creek that drained into the meandering creek, and then (4) continued their west/northwest journey almost another mile to the west before reaching the Hudson (*LPAH* pg 139.)

The red star is the approximate location of the footpath which led to Harmen Janse's house.

The surveyors specifically said that the footpath led

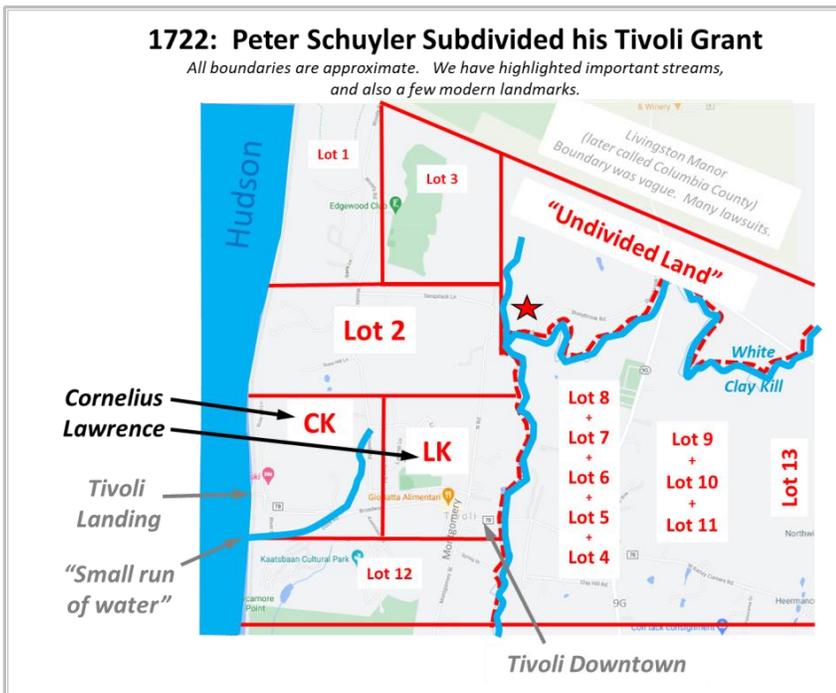


to Harmen Janse's house. The surveyors did not mention whether or not they could actually see Harmen Jansen's house off in the distance.

We already have a strong clue about where the surveyors were. The White Clay Kill is the only meandering creek in this area. We can solidify the story by looking at land records.

1722: Peter Schuyler and the Knickerbockers subdivided their land

In 1722, Peter Schuyler and the Knickerbocker heirs made a very complicated agreement. Schuyler and the heirs of Harmen Janse agreed to subdivide some of the land into 13 lots. The word some is very important to our story.



Shown here is a modern road map copied from Google Earth. We have added a few red lines. These highlight the approximate boundaries of the lots that are most important to our story.

The meandering path of the White Clay creek is shown in blue, towards the upper right edge of this map.

We have highlighted the small creek that merges with the White Kill near the red star. (This small creek is discussed later.)

We have also highlighted a "small run of water" towards the lower left. This is also discussed later.

In this agreement, the Knickerbockers kept more land than Peter Schuyler. The Knickerbockers received seven of the 13 lots (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10), and also half ownership in "the Undivided Land." The Knickerbockers also kept "land belonging to the heirs" along the Hudson. This language in the deed referred to the farms of Cornelius (near today's Tivoli Landing) and Lawrence (near today's downtown Tivoli.) These existing farms were exempt from the process of subdividing the other lands. This was a good bargain for the Knickerbockers.

The Knickerbockers each lived on nice properties that had easy access to water. This was crucial to early settlers. A horse can drink 10 gallons of water in a day. A farm can consume more than 50 gallons of water per day.

Cornelius and Lawrence selected great properties, stretching from Tivoli Landing to the White Clay. This provided easy access to water for drinking, fishing, and traveling. Tivoli Landing has always been important to the area. The northwest corner of Dutchess County sits on bedrock. In many areas people and animals can't reach the river due to steep bluffs along the shore. The "landing" is a natural feature where the bedrock to the north gives way to the marshes to the south. The first Native American on the Hudson probably parked his canoe here. Cornelius Knickerbocker – the first European to settle at the landing – picked a great location. It was beautiful area (until the railroad arrived).

We suspect that Peter Schuyler was the driving force behind subdividing the land. Schuyler was a distant landlord who lived in Albany. Once Schuyler had clear title, it was easy for him to begin selling his land at a profit. (The Hoffman family bought most of Peter Schuyler's lots in 1723.) It was probably different for some of the Knickerbockers, because this had become their home. The Knickerbockers were slower to sell.

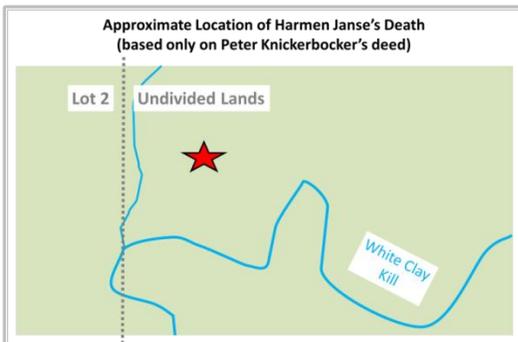
1732: Peter Knickerbocker sold Lot Number 2 to the Hoffmans

Peter Knickerbocker was the youngest son of Harmen Janse. He was only 20 when the lands were subdivided, and still lived in his father's old house. (LPAH pg 156.) The Knickerbocker family was free to decide how the seven lots were split among the family. Peter was given Lots 1 and 2.

Peter sold Lot 2 in 1732. Peter chose to mention in the deed that Harmen Janse had died in the Undivided Lands. This is a lucky break for us, as genealogists.



According to the 1732 deed, Lot 2 was 96 acres, and ran from the Hudson River "easterly to nothing at the wite clay creek or kill where the master brooks kill comes into the wite clays kill."



This map is drawn based on the information from Peter Knickerbocker's deed.

The eastern edge of Lot 2 was the creek that drains into the White Clay.

Harmen Janse died in the Undivided Lands, meaning that Harmen Janse died somewhere to the east of the small creek. We have illustrated this with a red star. We will explain the exact location of the red star on the next page.

The small creek still exists. It drains into the White Clay near the intersection of today's Stoneybrook Road and Sengstack Lane

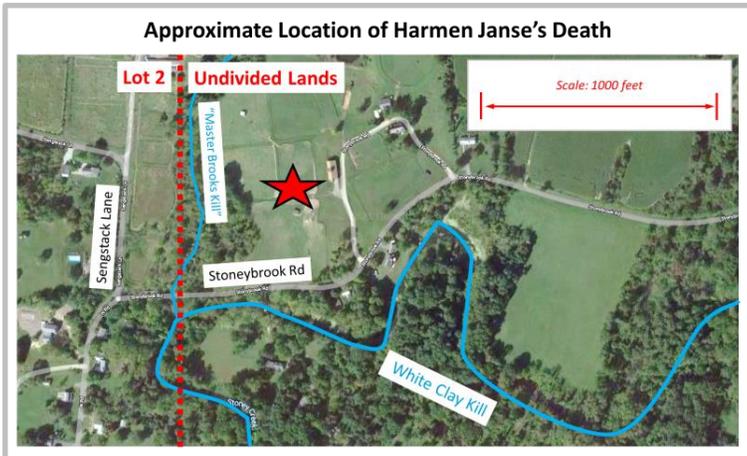
Shown here is a photograph from Google Earth. This was taken from Stoneybrook Road, looking north. The White Clay was behind the photographer. In Colonial times, Lot 2 was to the left of this photo. The Undivided Lands were to the upper right.



The "Undivided Lands" might have been created to avoid dealing with a messy situation. Later land records contain vague indications that somebody – perhaps Peter Schuyler – had already started to sell off individual lots even before the area had been formally subdivided.

Shown below is a satellite photograph of the area. The Hudson River is about three quarters of a mile beyond the left edge of this photograph. Peter Knickerbocker's "Lot 2" was on the left side of the red dashed line. The Undivided Lands were to the upper right. Schuyler's "Lot 8" was to the lower right.

The red star on this map is the approximate location of the footpath to Harmen Janse's house.



The surveyors crossed the White Clay two or three times (in their words). The surveyors saw the footpath, crossed the smaller creek, and then travelled a little less than a mile to the Hudson.

The red star on this map is approximately 4,900 feet from the Hudson River, measuring along the surveyor's west/northwest route.

It's clear that the surveyors were in this vicinity.

The smaller creek is the key to this story. The White Clay meanders over a wide stretch of Dutchess County, but there is only one smaller creek that fits the surveyor's description, within slightly less than a mile of the Hudson.

The red star is the approximate location of the footpath. Harmen Janse's house could have been slightly east of the red star, and/or slightly north. The area around the red star is good farmland and has easy access to water. (A key learning from this analysis is that Harmen Janse could not have lived west of the small creek or south of the White Clay. West was Lot 2. South was Lot 8.)

The footpath noticed by the surveyors might have been the predecessor to Stoneybrook Road. A modern road designer has the same constraints as a Native American on horseback. Stoneybrook Road meanders along because it needs to avoid the meandering path of the White Clay. Harmen Janse would have faced the same constraints when he chose a place to live, and when he led his horses to water.

We have been searching for Harmen Janse's location for many years. Now we now believe that we know where Harmen Janse lived, to within a few hundred yards.

It is conceivable that the surveyor's route was about 200 yard farther north. If so, they crossed the White Clay "two or three times" near the large bend near today's Route 9G and Stoneybrook Road. (That intersection is just beyond the upper right corner of the above satellite photo.) This doesn't change our story. The surveyors still crossed the meandering White Clay Kill, then saw the footpath, and then crossed the small creek. It's the small creek that is most crucial to this analysis.

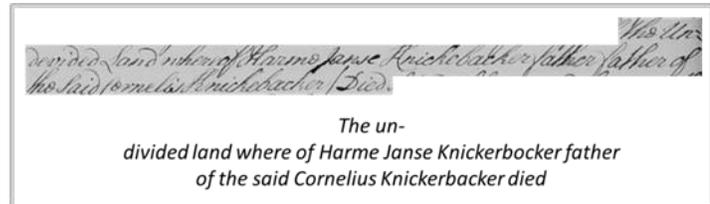
The discussion so far has focused on where Harmen Janse lived and died. Now we will switch gears and focus on where Harmen Janse was buried. This story is much simpler.

1733: Cornelius sold his land to the Hoffmans

Cornelius Knickerbocker was the older brother of Peter Knickerbocker. Deeds show that Cornelius owned land along the Hudson River. Cornelius’s land was just south of Peter’s “Lot 2.” Cornelius sold his land in 1733.

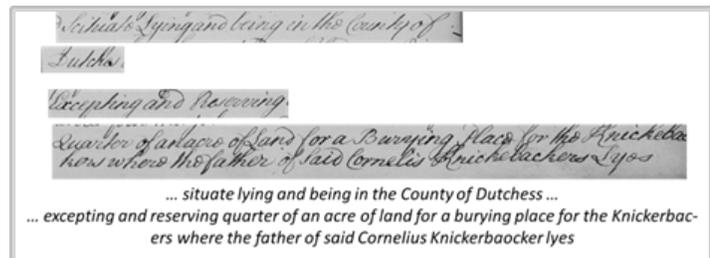
The deed contains two critical sections.

First, this deed stated that Harmen Janse died in the Undivided Lands. Once again, we have absolute proof that Harmen Janse died in Dutchess County.



Second, this deed mentions the burial of Harmen Janse Knickerbocker.

This is absolute proof that Harmen Janse was buried in Dutchess County.



Description of Cornelius Knickerbocker’s Land

North	Lot 2
West	Hudson River
South	“A Small Run of Water”
East	Lawrence Knickerbocker’s land

The deed described the boundaries of Cornelius Knickerbocker’s land.

For our purposes, the most important boundary was a “small run of water” that entered the Hudson River.

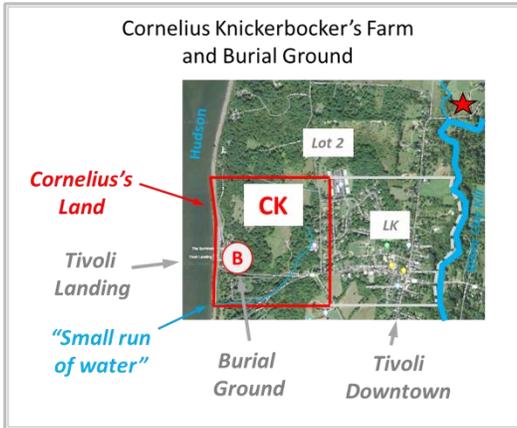
Fortunately for us, the town historian, Emily Majer, instantly recognized the implication of the “small run of water.”



The small run of water still exists, although the area has been greatly disturbed by the rail line.

In this photo, a very small stream passes under the rail line flows west to Hudson River. (The river is only a few feet away in this photo, but it is hidden by the brush.)

Diana Street – the center of Tivoli Landing – is about 900 feet to the right of this photo.



This is a satellite photograph with some added annotations. It shows the approximate boundaries of Cornelius Knickerbocker's land near Tivoli Landing.

The deed described a quarter-acre burial ground, but didn't give a specific location.

Interestingly, though, the oldest burial ground in the entire area is within Cornelius Knickerbocker's land. This is the letter "B" on the map.

As described below, this cannot be a coincidence. Harmen Janse was buried near the letter B on this map.

1882: An abandoned burial ground was documented in a local history

James H. Smith published a *History of Dutchess County* in 1882. Smith documented an abandoned burial ground on a bluff behind the Farmer's Hotel. The hotel is long gone, but the burial ground still exists.



This photograph shows the burial ground. This is a few hundred yards east of Tivoli Landing. Because of the shape of the bluff, this burial ground could never have been much bigger than about a quarter of an acre. This fits the description in Cornelius's deed.

In colonial times this would have been an ideal spot. It sits at the peak of the bluff facing the river. It would have a spectacular view of the Hudson Valley if the overgrowth were cleared.

By 1882 there were very few surviving tombstones. One tombstone was for Lawrence Knickerbocker. Another tombstone was for Jan Vosburg, the husband of Lawrence's sister Cornelia. (Jan's tombstone had washed down the hill.) There were also two tombstones for the spouses of Martin and Zacharias Hoffman. Fragments of some of these tombstones still exist today.

This is the only ancient burial ground that has ever been identified in this area.

The obvious conclusion is that the tiny burial ground in this photograph is the same tiny burial ground set aside by Cornelius Knickerbocker. Harmen Janse was probably the first burial. Then, in 1733, Cornelius moved to Sharon CT after selling his farm to the Hoffmans. Lawrence died in 1766 and was buried near to his father. Jan Vosburg died in 1775 and was buried near his father in law. (Their various spouses were almost certainly buried nearby.) During the intervening years the Hoffmans also took advantage of the burial ground on their newly purchased land.

The only alternative is that the Hoffmans created a second burial ground. However, why would Lawrence Knickerbocker and Jan Vosburg have been buried in a tiny Hoffman burial ground if there was already an older, equally tiny Knickerbocker burial ground? This is ridiculous. There was only one tiny burial ground. It was established by the Knickerbockers. It was briefly used by both Knickerbockers and Hoffmans, until the Hoffmans ran out of room. (The Hoffmans soon helped establish the Red Church, where the burial ground covers 10 acres.)

As mentioned earlier, Cornelius picked a great piece of land when he settled at the Landing. It is not surprising that the first-ever Knickerbocker Burial Ground was located here, on a bluff overlooking the Hudson.

Summary

We have also shown absolute proof that Harmen Janse died sometime between 1714 and 1718. (See the tax records.)

We have shown absolute proof that Harmen Janse died in Dutchess County. (See the deeds from Peter and Cornelius Knickerbocker.)

We have shown absolute proof that Harmen Janse was buried in Dutchess County. (See the deed from Cornelius Knickerbocker, when he sold his land to the Hoffmans.)

Those were the easy parts of this story.

After a much longer discussion, we have shown that Harmen Janse lived and died east / northeast of the intersection of today's Stoneybrook Road and Sengstack Lane.

We have also shown that the ancient burial ground once referred to as being "behind the Farmer's Hotel" is on land once owned by Cornelius Knickerbocker.

We have shown that Cornelius sold his land, and the burial ground, to the Hoffman family. We have discussed the fact that this burial ground was mentioned in a local history in 1882, and that tombstones of both Knickerbocker and Hoffman relatives were still present. This burial ground is the only one that has ever been found in this area.

Thus we have very strong evidence that Harmen Janse Knickerbocker was buried on the bluff along the Hudson, overlooking Tivoli Landing.

Unfortunately, though, Harmen Janse's tombstone no longer exists.