

CHAPTER XII.

THE SWARTWOUT MEADOWS.

1814-1826.

THE remunerative reclamation of marshy and waste land to the conditions of cultivation and occupation, as exemplified in Holland and other low regions, suggested in the second decade of this century the recovery for agricultural purposes of the swampy, tide-swept meadows in the state of New Jersey, opposite the southern part of Manhattan Island. The feasibility of making a part of that large extent of bog valuable property by banking it with protecting dikes and draining it by ditches, stimulated the two enterprising brothers, General Robert and Captain Samuel Swartwout, to undertake its rescue from overflowing tides and inundating freshets.

They began their venture by purchasing, on April 15, 1814, three hundred and twenty-seven acres of meadow, adjacent the site of "the new city, Hoboken," belonging to Colonel John Stevens. Their eldest brother, General John Swartwout, soon joined them in advancing the undertaking, and in a short time they were the possessors of four thousand acres lying between Hoboken and Newark.

In order to comprehend the defensive character of the embankments necessary to protect the extensive meadows from the invasive sway of the tides and freshets, the reader should know that the average difference between mean high and mean low water in the Hudson River, opposite Hoboken, is four feet and six inches. "During northeasterly or northerly storms, the level of the water is several feet higher than mean low water, the greatest difference that has been noted being three feet nine and a half inches, that is to say, there have been times, when, even at low tide, the water in the river was nine and a half inches higher than the surface of the meadows. On several occasions the water has risen more than three feet higher than mean high water, and, of course, at such times, the water in the river was four and a half feet higher than the level of the meadows, and one foot higher than the established grade of the meadow streets."