Enlarging Rensselaerswijck: 17th Century Land Acquisition on the East Side of the River

Shirley W. Dunn
Crailo State Historic Site

In 1660 Jeremias van Rensselaer wrote, “I bought the flat opposite Bethlehem, on the main land, from the Indians and have promised Pieter de Flamingh and Carsten de Noorman that they may dwell there…” In this casual way, much of the land in Rensselaerswijck on the east side of the river was acquired piece by piece during the seventeenth century.

Some writers have assumed that Kiliaen van Rensselaer, when he established Rensselaerswijck, bought an extensive rectangle of land stretching from Beeren Island at present-day Coeymans north to the Cohoes Falls near the mouth of the Mohawk River, having equal length on both sides of the river, and extending back into the interior 24 miles. This imaginary tract, reported as encompassing more than 700,000 acres, is a misunderstanding perpetrated over the years. In his lifetime, Kiliaen van Rensselaer never owned all the land described above. Although he had acquired land on the west side of the river between the above north and south bounds, he at first obtained only one limited parcel on the east side. This was followed by a second parcel on the east shore about six years later. The area north and south of these two grants remained in Indian hands and was not acquired by Kiliaen van Rensselaer. Moreover, the interior boundaries for all his early properties were non-specific, making any accurate computation of acreage impossible in his day.

The reason for the confusion about the first Patroon’s holdings is that in 1685, long after his death in 1643, Van Rensselaer’s descendants were awarded a patent by the English for a very large tract of land on both sides of the river. This patent contained the land commonly attributed to the first Patroon. The English patent of 1685 expanded the boundaries of Rensselaerswijck, particularly on the east side, to the limits requested by the Van Rensselaers, as part of a compromise settling Van Rensselaer claims of many years’ standing. Granting the boundaries requested by the family was intended to compensate them for the loss of the City of Albany and a tract to the west of it, as well as for the loss of certain privileges and rights. The city had grown up on land the Van Rensselaers still claimed under Kiliaen van Rensselaer’s original purchase on the west side. After the English takeover, those claims were renewed. The city was deemed too important to the province by British Governors Andros and Dongan to turn over to a single family, even though the Van Rensselaer’s position was conceded to be valid. The east and west boundaries twenty-four miles distant from the river awarded in 1685 reflected not the original bounds but the expansion which had occurred in over 50 years, as well as the need for a political boundary with neighboring jurisdictions, particularly Massachusetts to the east.

What were the limitations of the early purchases of Kiliaen van Rensselaer? How did his agents and descendants manage expansion of the Van Rensselaer holdings on the east side of the Hudson River, prior to 1685? Who else obtained land within the proposed bounds of the domain? These questions are worth investigating, since, with persistence and flexibility, the Van Rensselaers maintained long-term control of the lands so acquired, operating what might be termed their family business into the middle of the nineteenth century. The early land ownership patterns had a far-reaching effect on the development of a four-county area and served as a major focus for maintaining Dutch ethnic influence in the Hudson Valley.

The registration of Kiliaen van Rensselaer and his associates for their colony in 1629 specified they were choosing land “above and below Fort Orange on both sides of the . . . River . . .” Although this was merely an early statement of intention to form a colony, Kiliaen van Rensselaer had expressed his goals. Those which he did not achieve, despite his persistent efforts, became the goals of his family and officers of the colony in the years to come.

The Dutch West India Company patroonships in New Netherland were to be governed by the “Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions,” ratified in June, 1629, to regulate and encourage these “colonies.” Article V of this charter specified:
The patroons, by their agents, may, at the place where they wish to settle their colonies, (fix) their limits (so that the colony shall) extend four leagues along the coast on one side of a navigable river, or two leagues along both sides of a river and as far inland as the situation of the occupants will permit. 3

The Dutch West India Company was to retain ownership of lands between colonies but promised that no one else would be allowed to come within seven or eight leagues of a patroonship without the owner’s consent, except in special circumstances.

Article XXVI of the charter presented Kiliaen van Rensselaer and his successors with an irresistible lure. Investors might “satisfy the Indians of that place for the land and may enlarge the limits of their colonies if they settle a proportionate number of colonists thereon.”

Encouraged by this carte blanche, Kiliaen van Rensselaer was prepared to acquire land beyond the limits permitted by item V of the charter with his land acquisitions. His intentions were clear from the first. In a letter of January 1630, Van Rensselaer had urged his agent, Bastiaen Janz Krol, to buy lands from the Indians. “The limits he shall extend as far as possible, as high above Fort Orange and as far inland as they will in any way cede, equally below Fort Orange, even if it were five or more leagues above and as many below the same fort, and as far inland as possible . . .” 5 In 1630, land on the west shore stretching from below the present-day Nor-manskill to the Cohoes Falls, “extending three leagues,” and including also West Island (now the site of the Port of Albany) was purchased. The estimate of three leagues, a little over nine miles, was considerably short of the real distance. One parcel on the east shore from opposite West Island to opposite Fort Orange was also obtained. By May, 1631, Van Rensselaer’s representative had bought from the Indians additional land on the west shore between Beeren Island and Smack’s Island. The interior extent of this 1631 parcel was described as “two days’ journey inland.” 7 Of the first purchases, Van Rensselaer wrote in 1634 that the lands on the west shore extended inland “indefinitely.” 8 For the Semezeeck parcel on the east shore, neither the letter of 1634 nor the deed of 1630 specified a distance inland.

A new farm was to be established on the Semezeeck purchase on the east side. Van Rensselaer named it “De Laet’s-Burch” after one of his associates. On a map drawn about 1632 9 De Laet’s-Burch extended north and south of a mill stream, now Red Mill Creek, and included the large island adjacent to the north end of the property.

The De Laet’s-Burch farm later became the Van Rensselaer farm known as Crailo, appropriated by then Director Jeremias van Rensselaer for his personal support. A comparison of De Laet’s-Burch on the map of 1632 with the farm of Johannes van Rensselaer, an inheritor of Crailo, on a 1788 map confirms the similar location of the two farms. 10

Having made his first acquisitions and begun settlement, Kiliaen van Rensselaer turned his attention to further purchases from the Mahican Indians on the east side of the river. In 1634 he wrote, “I wish that the remaining little islands and also the land that is on the east side of the river and belongs to the Mahycans, had been bought also. Be pleased therein to do your best.” Delays extended over three years until finally in 1637 a purchase was made from the heirs of Papsickenakas, an Indian chief who had died after negotiations for his lands had begun. Jacob Planck, Officer and Commissary of Rensselaerswijck after 1634, finally concluded a purchase of the islands and mainland of Papsickenakas on April 23, 1637. This was actually about two weeks after settlers sent from Amsterdam in anticipation of the acquisition had arrived to occupy their farms on the main island. 11 The 1637 purchase encompassed the large island still known as Papscanee Island, with an accompanying small island (later known as Cooper’s Island) on the west of Papscanee as well as two other islands lying south of the large island. These later on eighteenth and nineteenth century maps were called Peghtals Island and Winne’s (or Campbell’s) Island. In addition, “all the main and broken land situate on the east side of the River aforesaid, and landward as far as their rights extend” was included. This purchase, supposed to end “almost opposite Smack’s Island,” extended to below present Castleton village. 12

A letter written by Kiliaen van Rensselaer in 1634 recites his acquisitions of 1630 and 1631 and clearly locates them on their respective sides of the river, clearing up any confusion which might have been caused by the vague wording of the deeds. The letter indicates he believed he owned all the land from Beeren Island to the Cohoes Falls on the west side of the river. This letter also expresses his expectation to add to Semezeeck on the east shore the islands of the Indian sachem, Papsickenakas, with the adjacent mainland. 13 Van Rensselaer speculated in 1634 that the acreage he had acquired amounted to 17,200 morgens of land, or about 35,000 acres. By 1636 he was suggesting to a partner that they had obtained over 300,000 acres of land. Both guesses fell short of the
estimated manor acreage given by Cadwallader Colden in 1762 as 1,132,000 acres. Colden was hostile to large landowners and possibly exaggerated the size of Rensselaerswijck.

By the time of the Patroon’s death, which occurred several years later in 1643, both the southern portion and the entire northern half of the future manor on the east side of the river had not been acquired either by patent from Dutch authorities or by deeds from the Mahican Indians.

Over the years after Kiliaen van Rensselaer’s death, many additional purchases of land from the local Indians were made by various representatives on behalf of the new Patroon, Kiliaen’s son, Johannes, and later heirs. A few outsiders also obtained land within the future limits of Rensselaerswijck. Since the outside buyers’ rights were contested by the Van Rensselaers in these controversial transactions, the formality of a legal document proving purchase of the land from the Indians either by the Van Rensselaers or by the outsiders was of importance in settling the issue. The requisite document describing the property, with Indian signatures and witnesses, and often listing the goods given in payment, was never neglected. On a few occasions, the Indian deed was signed after occupation of the land by a Dutch farmer. Having a tenant on the land was an additionally necessary proof of ownership, both to keep it from being reoccupied by the Indians and to keep it from being coveted by outsiders.

The earliest Van Rensselaer land purchases were registered before the Dutch West India Company authorities at New Amsterdam, but later additions were not. Kiliaen van Rensselaer, perhaps preferring that the full extent of his acquisitions remain unscrutinized, wrote: “Henceforth it will not be necessary for the grantees (Indians) to appear before the director and council of New Netherland, but it will be sufficient that they appear before the officer and council of the colony of Rensselaerswijck to make the transfer, making the same declaration as is put in former deeds.” In another letter referring to the lands of Papsikenakas he said, “If the savages make a sale, let the transfer be made before my officer and the court of Rensselaerswijck, using the form that Mr Paauw is now sending over...” This failure to notify authorities has been pointed out by Nissenson:

The charter, in permitting extension of the domain limits, made no provision for additional registration, but surely some form of notice would be requisite, not only to conform to the regulations for the original lands but also to prevent conflicts among subsequent settlers.

The Indian deeds became valuable pieces of parchment, to be produced whenever a challenge arose. In general, tracts were purchased from the Mahican Indians and then assigned to a Dutch miller or farmer. Sometimes the private individual took the initiative in making the Indian purchase, on behalf of the Patroon and with the assistance of the colony’s officials. On other occasions, the land was obtained by the Director or the officers of Rensselaerswijck with a promise of occupancy to a certain farmer or miller already arranged.

This was probably the case with the first addition made north of Semezeeck. A choice farm site was obtained for Thomas Chambers by the officers of the colony about 1646 in the area of present south Troy. This plot was known as “the farm between the two creeks;” the creeks were today’s Wynantskill, on the south, and Poestenkill, on the north. Chambers’ occupancy of the farm began about 1647, although an Indian deed for the property is dated 1652. In January, 1651, the Commissioners of Rensselaerswijck bought from the Indians the Wynantskill, a creek south of Chambers’ farm, with the surrounding woodland; the plot extended south to a point across the river from present Menands. The south line of this plot probably did not connect with the northern boundary of Semezeeck. Indian deeds of 1678 granted land to outsiders Dirck Wesselse and Cornelius van Dyck in this unoccupied space, over the objections of Maria van Rensselaer, serving as administrator of the colony of Rensselaerswijck, who claimed it was “purchased land.” In 1659, land along the Poestenkill, north of Chambers’ farm, was purchased for Rensselaerswijck by Jan Barents Kemp. Wemp’s boundary was to be north of the creek about “Sixty-six paces” into a meadow, where trees were marked. This location left the area of present North Troy and Lansingburgh outside Van Rensselaer hands. As late as 1684, a piece north of the Poestenkill extending to the Piscawen Kill was acquired “with the approbation of Mrs. Van Rensselaer” for the colony.

The first Patroon, Kiliaen van Rensselaer, had never come to New Netherland. The second Patroon, who was not active on behalf of the colony, also remained abroad. As a result, while the original land purchases had been managed by the first Patroon from overseas, through his representatives here, after his death the land acquisitions were arranged on site in Rensselaerswijck by officers of the colony, as the needs of the colony or of individuals dictated.
Fig. 2. "Mannor of Rensselaerswyck Map," believed to have been drafted in 1757 by Samuel Holland and based on a 1726 map by Cadwallader Colden. Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
As the years passed, some lands earlier purchased from the Mahicans but not occupied by farms or mills had to be repurchased from later members of the tribe. There are many examples. In 1660, Jeremias van Rensselaer, Director of Rensselaerswijck, obtained a flat near present Castleton from the Indians. This land probably had been included in the 1637 Papscanee purchase, but to avoid claims, it was purchased again. An earlier Director, Brant Aertz van Slichtenhorst, wrote, “If the lands are not occupied immediately at the payment, then gifts must be presented as often as one comes, especially as other Christians have an eye to the land.”

Lands on the west shore, within the bounds of the original patents as Kiliaen van Rensselaer had understood them, were repurchased from the Mahicans in the 1650s, 1660s and 1670s. Some of the duplicated Indian purchases went on well into the eighteenth century, particularly in lower Rensselaer County. Various islands in the river, particularly north of Beverwijck (Albany) were purchased individually by the Van Rensselaers. These fertile and readily arable lands were coveted by Beverwijck and Rensselaerswijck residents. When challenged about ownership, the Van Rensselaers were able to provide Indian deeds to retain them.

The situation with other islands near the east shore became more complex. The Van Rensselaers’ vague boundaries on the east side left desirable properties vulnerable. Early in 1654, Director Stuyvesant had declared that the Van Rensselaer’s “domain lands” were not to be disturbed until the boundary question was settled. Despite this, by the following October, Stuyvesant had granted to Andries Harpers Con stapel the right to obtain from natives the island opposite Fort Orange, although this island had been acquired by the Van Rensselaers with the Semezeeck purchase and much later it was clearly a part of Johannes van Rensselaer’s farm in the eighteenth century. However, in the 1650s, the Van Rensselaer tenant had left the island because of obstruction by the Indians. Stuyvesant’s rationale was that “... it was decided to grant the petitioner’s request because the island in question has been used as a thieves’ den by the Indians... to the great prejudice of the inhabitants of Fort Orange and the village of Beverwijck.”

Court cases bear out his concern. Sales of liquor to these Indians and thefts from the fort led to his decision. The Indians, a mixed group who had taken the island from the Mahicans, were reluctant to sell. They continued to cause trouble on the island. In 1660, Andries Harpers Con stapel and Rutger Jacobsen were permitted to buy one of the small islands south of Papscanee Island against the wishes of the colony of Rensselaerswijck. This small island was later known as Winne’s or Campbell’s Island.

Another outsider who obtained land on the east side of the river was Robert Sanders, who, in 1668, with Harme Vedder, obtained a farm and island north of present Troy from the Indians; Sanders in 1678 added a parcel to the south of his farm, extending it to the Piscawen Kill. While Sanders’ initial purchase was made with the knowledge of the Colony of Rensselaerswijck, he later procured English patents for his lands. The 1685 English patent obtained by the Van Rensselaers establishing Rensselaerswijck as a manor did not include Sanders’ property (subsequently sold by him and later known as Stone Arabia) which lay across the manor’s north bounds. Land to the south of the early Semezeeck and Papscanee parcels was also obtained piecemeal by the Directors of the Colony of Rensselaerswijck and by outsiders.

As early as 1640, Kiliaen van Rensselaer had been informed that the fur trade near Fort Orange was declining. Furs were being siphoned off by the English. He speculated in a letter that the trouble might be the carelessness of his settlers and the traders. The result was “... that the English on the Fresh (Connecticut) River, by corresponding with the Mahicans lying about two leagues below Fort Orange and through these in turn with the Mohawks, draw everything away from us...” These Mahican Indians were located in Schodack, near the south boundary of the Papscanee purchase.

It was not surprising that a new Director of Rensselaerswijck, Brant Aertz van Slichtenhorst, moved to close this gap, and by September, 1648, had approved a purchase of a creek close to the Indians’ location. This stream, with twin waterfalls, was known to the Indians as Paponicocck, to the Dutch as the Schodack Creek or the Goyer’s Kill, and is today’s Muitzeskill. The purchase included some adjoining land. A miller, Jacob Janse (Gardenier), obtained the stream from the Mahicans for the Patroon. Jacob Janse, also known as Flodder, very quickly built and operated mills there. Besides acquiring a prime mill site, the colony had obtained greater control of the Indian trade in the area.

A purchase of some related Schodack lands from the Indians was also made in spring, 1650, by Jeremias van Rensselaer.
Rensselaer, Director of Rensselaerswiack, again in association with Jacob Janse. In this sale of March 13, 1650, Jacob Janse purchased from a Mahican chief named Wanemanheet acreage on Schodack Island and the adjacent mainland described as "a piece of land on the large island, also called by the Dutch Aepjes Island, with a small piece of land on the east side of the little kill, for which I [Wanemanheet] have asked 4½ pieces of cloth, two handfuls of powder, one axe, and 2½ more." This "large island" lay south of the Muitzeskill and close to the present-day hamlet of Schodack Landing. Historian A.J.F. van Laer wrote that a Dutchman named Hans Jans Eencluys "in the spring of 1650 acted as interpreter for Jacob Janse Flodder in buying land from the Indians."25 The 1648 purchase of the Muitzeskill two years earlier did not specify any land on Schodack Island and had depended on Aepje, an Indian chief, as broker, indicating the two were entirely separate transactions. An item confirming the 1650 purchase of the upper end of Schodack Island is an entry in the account book of Jeremias van Rensselaer made in September, 1665. "To Hans Eencluys for his trouble in coming here to testify before Mr. Nicolles regarding Shotack."26 "Mr. Nicolles" was New York's first English Governor, Richard Nicolls, and Eencluys was the interpreter mentioned above.

This 1650 purchase from the Mahicans was used in 1664 by the Van Rensselaers to justify their claim to the whole island, for which they lacked any Dutch patent and for which they did not have complete Indian deeds. In making this claim they were not successful at the time, despite Hans Eencluys' testimony.

The mills on the Muitzeskill had been established for a decade, and the 1650 purchase had been made by Jeremias van Rensselaer, as well, when rumors came to the Van Rensselaers that two prosperous farmer-traders from Papsscanee Island and Beverwijck, well known to the Van Rensselaer family, were intending to acquire Schodack Island. Jeremias van Rensselaer noted in 1659 that, on behalf of the Dutch West India Company, Director Stuyvesant was giving consent to some farmers to buy from the Indians islands that lay within the claimed jurisdiction of the Van Rensselaer's colony, "under the pretext that the islands belong to the Company."27

In March, 1661, Jan Tomassen Witbeck and Volkert Jansen Douw formally petitioned Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam for permission to buy Apje's (Schodack) Island. An unhappy Jeremias van Rensselaer in May, 1663, paid for "a copy of the contract of sale of Schotack bought by Volckert Janz."28 By fall, Stuyvesant had issued the patent. In January, 1664, however, the Council of Rensselaerswyick passed a resolution annulling the purchase of land from the Indians at Schodack, made by Volckt Jansen and Jan Tomassen "without the consent of the Colony." When notice of this resolution was served on them, they produced a patent from Stuyvesant, dated Nov. 3, 1663.29 Three Indian deeds had been obtained by Jan Tomassen and Volckt Jansen in 1663 and another was procured in 1664. The last included land on the mainland near the island.

On April 25, 1664, Jeremias van Rensselaer wrote of this grant in a letter to Holland:

"... we have again suffered great inroads, as you will see from the deeds of purchase of Volckt Jansz and Jan Thomassz for the land on the east side and the large Mahikan island, for which they already have a patent and which they have already leased to several people, although I had protested against it ... Furthermore, we wrote at length about the boundaries of the colony, showing that it extends from Beeren Island to one half-mile beyond the farm of Jan Barentz Wemp ..."

Earlier in April, Jeremias had appeared at the General Assembly at New Amsterdam, where these and other matters had been brought up. But no attention was paid to his remarks and, he said,

"... I had to submit to it for the time being and had to listen to many derogatory remarks from them as to what belonged to our colony or where our boundary line was."30

On April 25, 1664, a letter was sent to Jan Tomassen and Volckt Jansen from the Director and Council of Rensselaerswyick, notifying them to abstain from settling on the land "until the limits of Rensselaerswyck be determined." This directive the new owners ignored, and sent a tenant farmer to Schodack Island immediately. Because the land had been cleared by the Indians, the farmer was able "to plow and sow without preliminaries." To halt this activity, Jeremias van Rensselaer in person came to Schodack on May 12, 1664. He landed angrily on the island with the officer (schout) and the Secretary of Rensselaerswyick to prevent the island from being cultivated by the tenant farmer. Afraid to proceed, the farmer soon appealed to the Court to release him from his obligation.31

With the arrival of English rule over New Netherland in August, 1664, the Schodack Island controversy took on new aspects. While the Van Rensselaers anxiously pressed for a determination of their status as holders of
Rensselaerswyck, the new English governors confirmed the grants of outsiders such as Jan Tomassen, Volkert Janssen, Robert Sanders and others within Rensselaerswyck’s possible limits. The Van Rensselaers, moreover, recognized that their claims at the north and south ends of Rensselaerswyck on the east side of the river were without legal documentation. In 1684, Richard van Rensselaer wrote from Holland to his sister-in-law, “I do not doubt, however, but your brother Stephanus van Cortland will be able to bring about this much through the present governor, Colonel Thomas Dongan, that the boundaries of the colony may be extended.” Maria wrote back, “And as to my brother Steeven’s . . . obtaining something from the governor with reference to the limits of the colony, brother says that the governor will write about it to the Duke . . .” 

The Van Rensselaers could do nothing until their own patent was granted, and that was not forthcoming until 1685. Meanwhile, other outsiders obtained the rest of the land claimed by the Van Rensselaers at the south end of the domain on the east side of the river, in the present town of Schodack.

Lower Schodack Island, also known as Moesiman’s Island, was purchased from the Indians in 1670 by Jonas Volkertse (Douw) son of Volkert Janse, part owner of Schodack Island. A deed for Moesiman’s Island, lying across from Beeren Island and present-day Coeymans, reads in part “. . . a certain Indian called Wisquemeet owner of a certain Island called by the Indians Cachtanaquick and by the Christians Moosmans Island did by deed 27 June 1670 transport said island to Jonas Volkertse, lying on the east side of Hudson’s River over against [opposite] Barne [Beeren] Island containing about 100 acres, which said John Volkertse did afterwards transfer said Island to his brother in law Gerrit Teunis. . . .” 

Captain Gerrit Teunis van Vechten, to whom the land was transferred, was a widely known soldier and politician who owned a farm near the present Schodack-East Greenbush line. He had the support of the English governor and his island was not included in the 1685 patent to the Van Rensselaers. Instead, he received his own patent confirming his ownership on August 28, 1685, about two months before the Van Rensselaer patent.

After 1687, the island was included in Rensselaerswyck. In 1675, Barent Mynderse, an Albany shoemaker, received a tract of the Schodack mainland containing about seventy-four acres from the Mahican Indians. This purchase was followed by a patent for the parcel from Governor Andros dated 1677. The land ran on the east side of the river from a point opposite the south end of Schodack Island south to “a stream flowing in between Beeren and Sheeter’s Islands,” at approximately the present-day Columbia and Rensselaer county line. Undoubtedly because of the continuing boundary controversy with the Van Rensselaers, Barent Mynderse’ grant was returned to the English governor. The date of the patent is given as September 29, 1677, while the purchase from the Indians was dated Sept. 2, 1675, according to a county history book. Neither of the purchase documents has been located, but the return is on file.

On this 5th day of August, Barent Mynderse, shoemaker, conveyed and made over to his honor, Sir Edmond Andross governor general, a certain parcel of land lying on the east side of Hudson’s river, near Shotax island, being a square piece, of one hundred and fifty rods square, containing thirty-seven morgen and three rods, as per patent thereof granted by his honor on the 29th of September 1677, all of which he now releases, acknowledging himself to be fully paid and satisfied for all his right and title to said lands, the first penny with the last, by the hand of the Receiver Robert Livingston. Done in Albany, the 5th of August 1679.

During the Dutch period and through the years when the Crown was being importuned to confirm the Van Rensselaer rights first granted by the Dutch “Charter of Privileges and Exemptions,” the authorities were reluctant to accede to the land acquisitions being made by the Van Rensselaers and their representatives. However, the attitude towards large land holders was one of respect, and the Van Rensselaer family members' patience and political connections proved effective.

In the course of their negotiations, they at various times presented proofs of their rights to the lands in question. One such memorial presented in 1678 lists the lands bought by Killianen van Rensselaer in 1630 and 1631, including the parcels listed previously on the west shore as well as Semezeek on the east side. Also included are the purchase of Papscanee made by Jacob Planck and the 1648 acquisition of the Muitzeskill. Purchases at Claverack in present-day Columbia County and at Catskill in Greene County, made in 1648 and 1649, are also recited. It must have been perfectly clear to the reader that the original title to the land on the east side did not extend to the boundaries requested by the family. However, at the same time, the memorial restated a long-held claim that the “fort formerly called Orange Fort lyes within the Limits of the Petitioners said Colony” and reminds the counsel to the Duke of York that the village “afterward called Beverwijck” was
 unjustly wrenched away from the Van Rensselaers in 1652 by Dutch Director Petrus Stuyvesant.37

The claim of the Van Rensselaers to the land on which now stood the village of Albany served to leverage their demands to extend the boundaries of the domain, and in 1685 they were granted the long-delayed patent. This exempted "the towne of Albany" but confirmed to two of the original patroon’s grandsons:

“All that and those tract and tracts of land called Ransselaerswijck lyeing and being on and upon the banks of Hudsons River in the County of Albany in the province of New York Aforesaid . . . beginning at the south end or parte of Beeren Island on Hudsons River and extending northwards up Along both sides of the said Hudsons River unto A place herefore Called the Kaboos or the Great Falls of the said River extending itselfe east and west all along from each side of the said river backwards into the woods twenty fouer english miles...”38

Finally, long after the first Patroon’s death, the Van Rensselaers had acquired the huge tract of 700,000 or more acres which is often erroneously attributed to him. The Van Rensselaer claim to Claverack in Columbia County was also upheld. Even after they received their English patent, the lords of the domain of Rensselaerswijck encountered boundary problems on the south line of the manor, along the north line in Rensselaer County, on the Massachusetts border, and even along the Normanskill.

It is clear from this study that the acquisition of the huge rectangle of land incorrectly attributed to Kiliaen van Rensselaer was not a simple matter of a few purchases in his lifetime. Years of gradual and controversial additions by means of Indian purchases made in the name of the Colony of Rensselaerswijck followed the Patroon’s death. Although Indian deeds for these purchases served to strengthen the Van Rensselaer claims, some outsiders obtained lands the Van Rensselaers desired to include in their domain. It was not until the final compromises and concessions outlined in the Patent of 1685 that the boundaries of Rensselaerswijck were finally extended to contain the lands on both sides of the river, from Beeren Island to the Cohoes Falls, reaching inland from the river 24 miles on each side.
Notes

1 A.J.F. van Laer, trans. and ed., Correspondence of Jeremias van Rensselaer (Albany: The University of the State of New York, 1932), 27.
4 See Correspondence of Jeremias van Rensselaer, 172.
5 Ibid., 172; Account Book of Jeremias van Rensselaer, New York State Library.
6 Correspondence of Jeremias van Rensselaer, 334, and “Map of the Province of New York,” by Cadwallader Colden, at the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
8 This account book can be found at the New York State Library in Manuscripts and Special Collections.
9 Correspondence of Maria van Rensselaer, 146, 169.
10 New York Secretary of State, Patents, Book 5, 203 in New York State Archives, Albany. Courtesy of Paul R. Huey.
12 Ibid., 247.