

# Old Growth Sanctuary

Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest  
North Carolina, 1996

A Travel Adventure by Bill Greer

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### About the Author

Adventure travel expert Bill Greer is the founder of GORP.com, the early Internet era's leading community for outdoor and adventure travel, selected as one of the Top 50 sites on the web in 2000. More recently, he is the author of **The Mevrouw Who Saved Manhattan**, a novel of New Amsterdam that paints a real and bawdy portrait of Dutch life on the Hudson through the eyes of a sharp-tongued bride who comes among the first settlers. Visit Bill at [www.billsbrownstone.com](http://www.billsbrownstone.com).

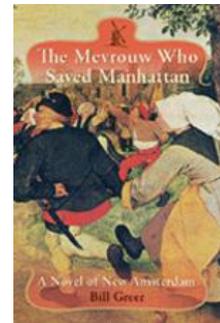
### Reviews for The Mevrouw Who Saved Manhattan

#### From de Halve Maen, Journal of the Holland Society of New York, Summer 2009

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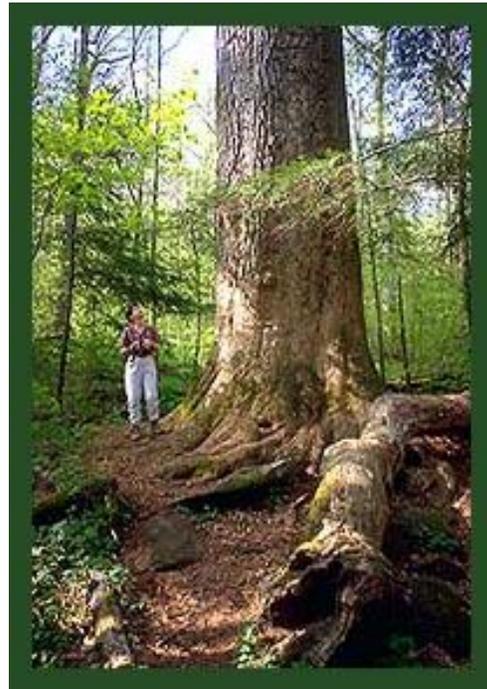
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### Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest, North Carolina, 1996

By Bill Greer

**B**y the 1920s, time was running out for the virgin woods of Little Santeelah Creek. The Cherokee had long since been evicted from their ancestral home in the surrounding valleys. Wealthy plantation owners had developed large tracts of the best bottomlands before the Civil War, and while much of the land had been sold off to northern interests, small farmers and moonshiners still exploited whatever patches of mediocre soil or concealed hollows that they could get their hands on.

In 1915, the saws began singing in the neighboring valley of Slickrock Creek. The Babcock Land and Timber Company had recently purchased the land and begun its harvest of sugar maple, tulip and other valuable trees. A rail line ran along the Little Tennessee River into which the Slickrock flowed. The logs could be sent down the drainage and loaded onto flat cars for easy transport to the mills and the markets.



Within 7 years, more than half the valley had been logged out. Babcock began pruning the best specimens from the remaining stands, knowing that its time was limited. The damming of the Little Tennessee would soon flood the rail line, making transport of the logs uneconomical.

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The company began surveying the adjacent lands, searching for the next valley in which to bring its axes and lumbermen.

Little Santeelah lay just over a ridge to the east. But the lumbermen looked west, where Citico Creek drained a vast virgin forest. As they moved in that direction, the Little Santeelah gained a few more years. Citico occupied the saws for awhile, until a huge fire swept through thousands of acres and destroyed the centuries-old stands that had brought the timbermen into the valley. Once again, they moved on to another watershed.



By the early thirties, the Little Santeelah forest was an isolated island in a sea of cleared lands. Inevitably it fell under the gaze of the lumbermen, but each time they moved into the valley, its huge yellow poplars and chestnuts filled them with awe. Some mysterious protection prevented them from swinging the axes. The land exchanged hands several times, each owner eager to gain the riches from felling the giant hardwoods that towered over the stream. One owner began constructing splash dams to float the trees out. But with the Depression casting a pall over the country, its money ran out before the first blade could bite into an unblemished trunk.

The Gennett Lumber Company had the last chance to fell the giants of the Little Santeelah. But whether from a lumberman's respect for nature's mightiest, or the financial hardship enveloping the country, or an unknown force diverting all encroachers, the blades never cut.

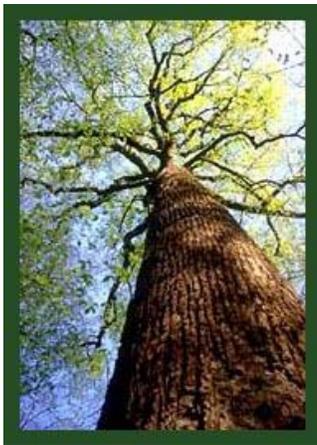
In 1935, anxious to find a suitable tribute for a fallen hero whose poem "Trees" had inspired millions, the Forest Service inaugurated the

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Little Santeelah as the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Nature's centuries-old masterpiece would be protected for generations into the future.

**T**HE JOYCE KILMER MEMORIAL FOREST is now the largest stand of old growth trees in the eastern United States. The 3,800 acre preserve commemorates Joyce Kilmer, a fallen World War I soldier and poet who was killed in action at the age of 31. His masterpiece poem testifies to the power of the remaining giants: *"I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree..."*

A figure-eight trail winds through the dark enchanted forest, magic for anyone who has never experienced a true forest primeval. The 2 mile path is soft underfoot, cushioned by the leaves dropped from the canopy towering overhead. In about half a mile, the trail comes to the center of the eight, where a plaque is laid in honor of the forest's namesake. Crossing Little Santeelah Creek, the trail continues on to the upper loop, entering the Poplar Grove.



The immensity of the trees strikes one first. These specimens are truly behemoths hundreds of years old. Poplars, hemlocks, chestnuts, and oaks stretch hundreds of feet toward the sky. An ancient's base may extend 20 feet around, stretching out ever further at ground level as it seeks a toehold to keep the tower upright. High overhead, a gangly set of branches is silhouetted against the sky in early spring, the leaves just beginning to bud out and filter the light down to the forest floor.

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While the trees symbolize centuries of growth, the floor itself holds much of the fascination of the mature forest. Unlike lands recovering from recent cuts, this ground is open, not littered with second growth. The cycle of life is evident where young trees barely a child's height grow beside massive rotting timbers, their surfaces completely shrouded with the glossy green moss that is helping to break them down. In the dappled sunlight reaching the ground on an April morning, wildflowers are blossoming, tiny purple irises peeking through the deadfall, others of yellows, reds, and whites scattered beside the trail.



As one completes the upper loop of just under a mile, a bridge crosses to the north side of the Little Santeelah. Along the streambed, the forest floor closes into a massive rhododendron thicket. The creek tumbles over mossy rocks, the sound of flowing water breaking the stillness of a spring morning. In another half mile the trail winds back to its beginning.

*The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest is part of the Nantahala National Forest. It is located in western North Carolina near Robbinsville.*

# The Mevrouw Who Saved Manhattan

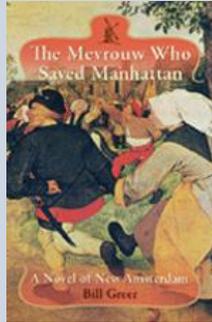
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“A very authentic ring ...  
like etchings by  
Van Ostade and Steen.”

– Charles Wendell, Ph.D., President of  
the New Netherland Institute

## A Novel of New Amsterdam

When Mevrouw Jackie Lambert opens her New Amsterdam tavern in 1626, she jumps aboard a madcap ride through New York history. With a razor-sharp tongue and the tastiest beer on either side of the Atlantic, Jackie spurs the tiny Manhattan settlement toward a head-on collision with the tyrannical Dutchmen who rule it. Poison, blackmail, murder, all are fair game as she fends off threats to the family she yearned for growing up as an orphan. And when peggleg Peter Stuyvesant would rather destroy the town than surrender his honor, Jackie must take history into her own hands or lose everything she has spent a lifetime building.



## A Real Portrait

While a work of fiction, *The Mevrouw Who Saved Manhattan* paints a real portrait of life in New Amsterdam with all its humor, bawdiness, and conflict. It presents a window into how Dutch culture during the Golden Age of the Netherlands transplanted to the wilderness of the Hudson Valley. The thread of Jackie's life reflects the central theme of the Dutch period, the rebellion of the common people against their rulers, the Dutch West India Company and its Directors, a conflict that historians argue laid the foundation for the pluralistic, freedom-loving society that America became.

## About the Author

Bill Greer has spent much of his working life in the heart of New Amsterdam. He is a Trustee and Treasurer of the New Netherland Institute, a membership organization supporting research and education in Dutch-American history. Visit him at [www.BillsBrownstone.com](http://www.BillsBrownstone.com) for more on Mevrouw's world and old New York and to read an excerpt of fifty pages from *The Mevrouw Who Saved Manhattan*.

CONTACT: [Bill@BillsBrownstone.com](mailto:Bill@BillsBrownstone.com) / 347-204-1917

## Reviews

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Manhattan View Press, New York  
2009

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