

**“The Rise and Fall of New Netherland: a Study of Dutch Colonization in America from
1614 to 1664”**

Colonial Wars Society Essay Contest

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(Merwick 71). In 1624, they brought over 30 families, the first settlers of the new colony. Interestingly enough, these families were not actually Dutch but Walloon (French-speaking Belgians), who settled around the area of Fort Orange (present-day Albany).

In 1625, one of the colony's first leaders, Willem Verhulst purchased Manhattan Island from local Native Americans for the equivalent of 60 Dutch guilders (about 24 dollars today). When Peter Minuit assumed leadership of the colony in 1626, he bought Staten Island, setting a precedent for Dutch acquisition of new land purchase rather than by seizure. Because the colony only contained about 270 people, Minuit decided, for safety and centralization reasons, to evacuate most of the settlers from Fort Orange and consolidate the settlement known as New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island (Fryer 255). Born in the Dutchy of Cleves, Minuit and his five-member council were responsible for the government of the colony, and although Minuit was required to swear allegiance to the United Netherlands, all officials were appointed and removed by the West India Company, not the Dutch government. Thus the company, whose only real interest (and only a passing interest at that since they were making one million times as much from Spanish loot) was the colony's fur trade, held most of the control over the colony (Channing 446-7). In fact, the company really had very little real interest in the settlement of the colony, being mainly focused on establishing an alliance with the Iroquois Confederacy and persuading them to funnel the fur trade through the Dutch rather than the French or the English (Fryer 255).

To this end they decided to shift the responsibility of settlement to private individuals, by extending the feudal system of land holding practiced in the Netherlands to the colonies. The Charter of Privileges to Patroons, issued in June of 1629 said that a

member of the company, who within four years would transport 50 families to New Netherland, would be given an extensive tract of land, which, however he would have to acquire from the Native Americans (Channing 447):

“All such shall be acknowledged Patroons of New Netherland who shall, within the space of four years next after they have given notice to any of the Chambers of the Company here, or to the Commander or Council there, undertake to plant a Colonie there of fifty souls, upwards of fifteen years old; one-fourth part within one year, and within three years after the sending of the first, making together four years, the remainder, to the full number of fifty persons, to be shipped from hence, on pain, in case of willful neglect, of being deprived of the privileges obtained” (Charter of Privileges to Patroons 44).

Of these patroonships which were established, only one, called Rensselaerswyck, in the upper Hudson River region, flourished. Peter Minuit had promoted the settlement of the colony and the Patroonships, which made him unpopular with some of the company directors. In 1631 he was removed, leaving New Netherland “struggling for survival, lacking settlers, and financial resources” (“New Netherlands” 125).

In 1637, Willem Kieft took control of the colony as director general, replacing Wouter van Twiller (1631-1637), who had trouble handling hostile officials. Kieft’s aggressive Native American taxation and land acquisition policies resulted, in the summer of 1641, in Native American raids of remote Dutch settlements. These raids served as the catalyst for a conflict known as Kieft’s war which raged until 1645 and which decimated Native American populations, killing nearly 1,000 (Fryer 256). During this conflict settlers were forced to seek refuge behind a wall built across Manhattan Island, which later gave Wall Street its name. All this violence failed to eliminate opposition to Dutch settlement and set the stage for continuing conflict between the natives and the settlers in decades to come. Kieft’s successor, Peter Stuyvesant, who

came to New Netherland in 1637, was one of the only Dutch governors to put public good ahead of private interests and to attempt to shift the colony towards self-government (The New World 83). During Stuyvesant's control, the colony came into conflict with a Swedish settlement known as New Sweden along the Delaware River.

Sweden and the Netherlands had long been trading partners in Europe and in the 1630's, a Dutch West India Company director entered a secret partnership with the Swedish government to found an American colony. They chose Peter Minuit, a former Governor of New Netherland, to lead the settlement of New Sweden on the Delaware River near present-day Wilmington. At first Dutch and Swedish settlers worked together to push the English out of the region, but when Stuyvesant became director-general, he was determined to take control of the Delaware valley. And in 1655, with the help of a large warship from Amsterdam, he forced the Swedish soldiers to surrender. However, most of the Swedish colonists remained in their villages, and New Sweden became incorporated into New Netherlands ("New Netherlands" 127).

In the mid-1650's, partnerships with Amsterdam's merchant houses were established, and transatlantic trade was regularized. New Netherlanders also began to play a large role in the slave trade, the first shipment arriving in New Amsterdam in 1655 on the way to the southern colonies or West Indies (Merwick 72). In New Netherland slavery was quite common, but because there were basic protections of those enslaved and because a slave code was never established, the status of a slave was much more flexible than in other colonies. Before 1650, The Dutch West India Company owned most of the slaves in the colony and was known to manumit or grant "half-freedom" to those slaves who had served well. Slaves with "half-freedom" were allowed to live with

their families and own property while still working for the company. Black parents often taught their children the trades they knew, and some even apprenticed them to whites who promised to treat them well. In 1664 there were about 500 slaves working in New Netherland out of a population of 10,000 (The American Eras 174).

In addition to the Black population, New Netherland also contained many other nationalities and religions. Company officials and patrons recruited settlers from England, Germany, Norway, and other countries, and by the mid 1600's only about half of the people in New Netherland were actually Dutch. One clergyman walking around the streets of New Amsterdam reported hearing 18 different languages. This lack of homogeneous Dutch settlement was probably because, during this period of time, the Dutch Netherlands experienced a period of stability and prosperity, resulting in a reluctance to leave the Dutch Netherlands. In addition to many different nationalities, the colonists also practiced many different religions. Though those who were not Dutch Reformed Protestants could not practice their religion publicly, many Lutherans, Congregationalists, Quakers, and Jews co-existed in the colony (Fryer 257).

As New Netherland became more successful, it also became more threatening to the English and their colonies. A Dutch presence in America would have prevented the English from providing solid and unified resistance to France. Dutch presence also made it impossible for the English to administer their Navigation Acts effectively or even to create any kind of unified commercial system. In addition, Dutch leaders excluding Stuyvesant had neither been effective nor had administered the colony in such a way as to promote loyalty. The conflict within the company over whether the colony should be primarily a trading post or whether it should be more focused on settlement and

colonization caused New Netherland to consist of an indecisive mixture of trade and settlement and resulted in the development of a somewhat weak colony. Therefore in 1664, Peter Stuyvesant found it virtually impossible to mount any kind of effective defense against the English ships which had sailed into the New Amsterdam harbor. And on August 29, New Netherland surrendered to the English and became New York, touching off the Second Anglo-Dutch war (Cambridge Modern History 39). Later during the Third Anglo-Dutch war, the Netherlands took control of the colony again for 14 months, but in the end gave it back to the English in exchange for the colony of Surinam off the Northern coast of South America ("New Netherland" 127).

Despite their relatively brief control over New Netherland, the Dutch left a lasting impact on the area. The estates established by patroons along the Hudson river kept their feudalistic aspects all the way up the American Revolution. New Netherland's architecture, a mix of Dutch and Flemish construction techniques which were adapted to fit the weather and materials of the region, continued to be built for many years (The American Eras 53). Even the Dutch policies of toleration and diversity continue today in the mix of different people and cultures present in New York City.

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