





# 1609

The forgotten  
history of  
Hudson,  
Amsterdam  
and New York

## Foreword

On April 4th 1609 the ship Half Moon under Captain Henry Hudson sailed from Amsterdam harbor to find a shorter route to Asia. In this pamphlet Geert Mak and Russell Shorto report on the events that occurred in 1609 and the consequences of this legendary voyage that would accidentally bring Hudson to New York. Today New York is the city where talent from all parts of the world converges; it's an economic and cultural power center, diverse and brimming with energy. In this book we retrace history: what is the legacy of the Dutch Republic in the city that was originally called New Amsterdam?

The arrival of Henry Hudson in New York has been celebrated before. In 1909 the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary was the biggest celebration ever held in New York. Fifty years later Princess Beatrix (now Queen) of the Netherlands visited New York in honor of Hudson's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary and was treated to a ticker tape parade along Broadway. The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henry Hudson's journey will be celebrated on both sides of the Atlantic. The Henry Hudson 400

This special commemorative history has been generously underwritten by



We also thank many HH 400 supporters: City of Amsterdam, New York Stock Exchange Foundation, NYC & Company Foundation, Province of Noord-Holland, DHV Group, Chamber of Commerce Amsterdam, Océ North America Inc., Vesteda Group BV, Feadship, International Flower Bulb Centre, Port of Amsterdam, Horwath de Zeeuw & de Keizer, Holland America Friendship Foundation, Aegon N.V.

Concept: Franz Houter, Klaas Pater and Gert Tetteroo

### Acknowledgements

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Print: HelloGraphics

Illustrations: Dutch National Archives and

Dutch Stock Exchange Foundation (Stichting VvdE)

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Foundation, organized in both Amsterdam and New York, will produce several major events and has also inspired many groups to plan exhibitions and programs. Our foundation will celebrate the venerable bonds between our two countries and our mutual passion for trade, freedom and diversity. We hope this commemoration will serve as a catalyst for trans-Atlantic cooperation in all areas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We dedicate this book to a true Dutch-American who helped both Foundations greatly – Chris Devries – and to Captain Henry Hudson who became immortal as he explored the boundaries of the known – and unknown – world. We offer this volume on behalf of the Boards of Directors of Henry Hudson 400,

Angela Haines, Gerard Jongerius, Patrick Poelmann, Gert Tetteroo

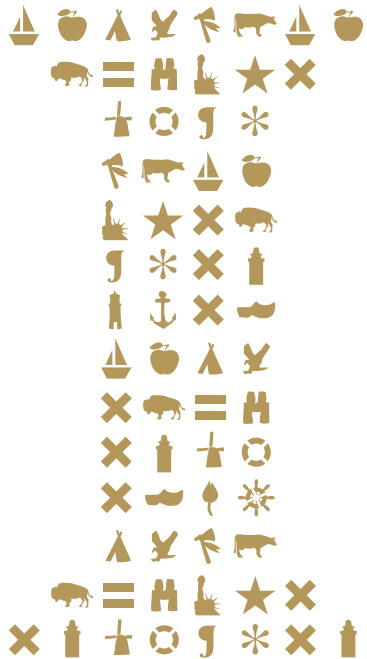
Amsterdam and New York, January 1, 2009

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# Henry Hudson in Amsterdam

By Geert Mak



In the autumn of 1608 an English sailor arrived in Amsterdam: a rash Briton who would achieve world fame because of a journey he himself regarded as a failure, a certain Henry Hudson. The sailor probably began his acquaintance with the city at the same place as the present-day rail traveler: the old harbor.

In the months to follow the city and sailor would become involved with each other a great deal; in fact they would write world history together – though in a totally different way from what either foresaw.

The city had already existed for a couple of centuries, but Amsterdam was still young,

that fall of 1608. Many currently well-known buildings and towers were missing on the town horizon. The big merchant houses at the Prince Hendrik quay were still to be built. The city ended approximately where its center now lies, and the bustle was of a totally different character too. Most of the buildings were half the size they are at present. A fortification like the Weeping Tower – now an old café you casually pass – was then a powerful fist thrusting into the harbor.

What Hudson saw, from the place where the Central Station now stands, was a forest of masts and towers, riddled with sails, pennants and flags. Beyond lay a city on the move; a bevy of ships, cranes, dock-hands, workmen and other folk. In front of all that, however, a curious transition area was located, a salty, sloshing and tranquil water landscape, a long strip of old jetties, rotting bollards, wooden watch houses, and everywhere bobbing ships, small and large.

Our sailor first had to pass through this flurry of activity, before he could penetrate the thicket of the Warmoesstraat and the Nes – then the busiest streets in the city – and before he would pay his respects at one of the merchant houses in the now infamous red-light district, then

home to one of the most stately of canals. To take care of business, Hudson would make his way to a brand new building: the East India House - now a university complex, then the center of the first multinational company in the world, the Dutch East India Company.

Henry Hudson perceived the city during one of the most important transitions in its history. Here and there in Amsterdam rows of wooden houses from the Middle Ages still existed, with pointy, tilting facades such as you can sometimes still find in small German towns. While the young Dutch Republic was still at war with feudal Spain, negotiations had been started, and the following year an armistice would be signed. The city still lay packed tightly within its old walls and gates. For most of his business Hudson had to walk only a couple of minutes. His most important patron, the merchant Dirck Van Os, lived in the Nes, so that most discussions about routes and maps took place in the nearby Saint Olof Chapel. His other patrons resided in the East India House, and of course he often passed through the Dam Square, the administrative and governmental heart of the city.

But that same year, 1608, a new beginning

was made with such innovations as a commodity exchange, a unique trading place for merchants, and also an exchange bank that modernized currency exchange in a profound way. For the first time in the history of commerce any currency in the world could be traded for stable certificates. Furthermore that winter the greatest city expansion plan in Europe since Roman times was diligently being drawn: three grand canals, plus a working-class district and a town rampart that would enclose the old city. About a year later definitive decisions would be made about the design of this growing city.

Meanwhile tens of thousands of newcomers remained outside the gates, as we can read in contemporary journals, living in “humble dwellings” or in slums against the city wall, and in its niches. Along the paths and polder ditches – especially around the western city gate – lay districts--populated with workshops, modest houses or huts, often with vegetable gardens and pig sties--largely habited by immigrants. In the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the population of Amsterdam had tripled and a huge part of this new citizenry came from the Southern Netherlands.

Antwerp had been deserted after the Spaniards conquered the city in 1585, and the Dutch Republic had blocked the River Schelde, the lifeline of Antwerp's harbor. Tens of thousands of Protestants and other dissidents, including many rich merchants and artisans, had moved north to Amsterdam, taking with them their knowledge, skills and trade networks. Because of the persecutions of the Spanish Inquisition, there were Sephardic Jews among the displaced. At first driven north from the Iberian peninsula, they initially arrived in Antwerp. But after the collapse of Antwerp, they moved north again, especially to Amsterdam.

All these immigrants arrived at exactly the right time in the right place— something that does not always happen in history. In the burgeoning Republic there was a great demand for new trade connections and for artisans to produce luxury products. Within one generation the immigrants from the Southern Netherlands controlled a third of the Amsterdam staples market. Their craftsmen introduced the silk industry and sugar refineries. They brought with them new painting techniques and thanks to them, along with the relative tolerance of the city administration,

the Amsterdam publishing industry achieved international fame. The Sephardic Jews lay the foundations for the tobacco trade and the diamond industry. Even the language changed: the traditional Amsterdam dialect was gradually being replaced by Antwerp slang.

It was because of these networks – along with their knowledge of the Portuguese voyages of exploration that had reached the Dutch Republic through the grapevine – that the citizens of Amsterdam succeeded in breaching the Portuguese trade monopoly first in Africa, and later in Asia. In March 1594 nine merchants met at the wine house of Martin Spil in the Warmoesstraat – among them Dirck Van Os, Reynier Pauw, Pieter Dircksz. Hasselaer and Arent ten Grootenhuys - men Hudson would later have dealings with. They agreed to collectively equip an expedition to the Far East. Under the command of Cornelis de Houtman, four ships were sent off, of which, after two long years, only three returned. The profits were meager and a distressing number of the crew did not survive the journey, but one fact had been proven: a direct crossing from the Netherlands to Southeast Asia was feasible.



Only one year later 22 ships from Holland and the southern province of Zeeland set sail for the rich Spice Islands, and by 1602 an impressive 65 ships had set sail for the East. The Portuguese could not maintain their trade monopoly to Southeast Asia; the number of seafarers that sailed from Lisbon declined dramatically. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a safe trade route to the East was worth more than gold. Along with pepper, trade also included rubber, ivory, sugar and from Africa, gold. The Dutch approach to this high stakes gamble was to share the risk. An Amsterdam ship owner did not own a ship, but bought a part: sometimes only a tenth, or in some cases a share in the ownership of tens of ships. Through such joint enterprises, named *compagnieën* – companies – the Dutch merchants financed the most risky ventures: even if they all failed, their losses would be limited.

In 1602 the companies that sailed Southeast Asia merged into *the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC)* or the Dutch East India Company: the first multinational in the world. For two centuries the Dutch East India Company would monopolize all Dutch trade with and shipping to Asia. Furthermore, they built

fortifications at the Cape – later Cape Town – and in Southeast Asia – Batavia, today Jakarta – though they never actually colonized these areas. The Dutch East India Company remained a trading operation, powerful and violent indeed, but ultimately a business, that operated along the coasts of Africa and the archipelago of Southeast Asia. For this multinational enterprise the trade among the nations of Southeast Asia, China, India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and the rest of Asia was at least as important as European trade with the East.

Henry Hudson was also confronted with this dynamic community of immigrants in the growing city. One of them was Dirck Van Os, the person who would eventually sign his contract, a member of an eminent family from Antwerp who had made his fortune in Amsterdam as a grain- and wood merchant, trading with Russia and the Baltic states. He was a founder of the City Exchange Bank and headed the reclamation of the Beemster, one of the oldest polders, or wetlands, in Holland, but he was also one of the founders of the Dutch East India Company. The oldest stock certificate in the world that still exists, a Dutch East India Company share from September 1606,

is signed by Van Os and fellow director Arent ten Grootenhuys.

For years Van Os had conducted his Russian trade in close partnership with Isaac Le Maire, also a southerner, from Doornik, today a city in Belgium. Together they gave birth to the Dutch East India Company, but three years later Le Maire left the Company after a charge of fraud, and probably fell out with his old companion Van Os too. Hudson also became part of this feud. The vindictive Le Maire has made his mark in history as the inventor of the practice called “naked short selling.” In 1609 when he decided to get rid of his stake in the Dutch East India Company, he speculated on falling prices, even selling more shares than he owned, in the hope that he could buy them back later for lower prices. This ploy is still a favorite activity at the world’s stock exchanges, especially for hedge funds that don’t shy away from risks.

That winter Hudson also had intensive contact with the Flemish Petrus Platevoet – who had Romanized his name to Petrus Plancius – a fierce Calvinistic clergyman, as well as one of the most important map makers of the Republic. He was both the driving force behind several

hazardous expeditions of the Dutch East India Company, and a fundamentalist theologian who in 1601 had pleaded for a prohibition of public services for Lutherans, because they had a different viewpoint than he had in certain doctrines.

At first Plancius succeeded in his mission; the merchant mayors that governed the city swallowed his theological disquisitions, as long as he provided them with the results of his study of his globes. His cartographic knowledge after all was indispensable for further expeditions. But they rapidly changed opinion when the Lutheran Baltic states, as well as the King of Denmark, took a stand for their fellow believers. They did not want to offend such important trading partners. The Lutherans regained their rights. Even when it came to matters of the soul and salvation, within certain boundaries, the highest bidder prevailed.

In 1608 a typical incident occurred in the Republic, a story saved from oblivion by Voltaire who recounted it in his historic treatises. The Marquis Spinola and the diplomat Richardot were on their way to The Hague as part of a distinguished Spanish delegation to negotiate a

treaty with the Dutch. En route they saw a party of ten men disembark a simple small boat, sit down on the grass and consume a meal of beer, bread and cheese; everyone brought his own provisions. From a nearby farmer the diplomats learned to their amazement who these people were: “These are the delegates of our States, our independent lords and masters.” It was, in short, the Dutch delegation with whom the Spanish delegation would have to negotiate on equal terms in the weeks to come. The Spaniards and French could not stop remarking on the simple lifestyle that even the elite maintained, though the Dutch found it perfectly normal. Without any doubt it had something to do with fact that prosperity, power and wealth had arrived really quite abruptly to this generation of citizens.

Hudson’s patrons were multifaceted men. For instance, Pieter Dircksz. Hasselaer, had as a young man played a heroic role in the Spanish siege of Haarlem in 1573 during the Dutch war of independence. Now Hasselaer, one of the richest merchants of the Republic, sent out expeditions to Asia and to the outer edges of the pole. The same diversity of interest marked the life and notions of Petrus Plancius: the old-

fashioned zealot who simultaneously was a forerunner of modern cartography. And Reinier Pauw, another director of the Dutch East India Company had been the mayor, eight times, of the rapidly changing Amsterdam, as shown in a portrait by Jan Ravensteyn wearing dark, modest and unfashionable clothing with no hint of either his authority or his wealth. Especially in the sea provinces, feudal relations were almost nonexistent. The value system placed money on a higher scale than family connections, prestige, or even respectability.

“In this city there’s not a person who doesn’t trade,” wrote French philosopher René Descartes, when he landed in Amsterdam around 1635. “Everybody is so fulfilled with his own profit, that I could live here my whole life without being noticed by anyone.”

The British historian J.L. Price would later compare the stories of foreign visitors of the young Republic with the experiences of young Europeans nowadays who see America for the first time: everything seemed familiar, but was in fact a quarter of a turn different. What disoriented 17<sup>th</sup> century visitors to Amsterdam was the open political debate, the shocking religious

tolerance, the unlimited urbanization, and the new humanism in a Europe that still was profoundly conservative. In some ways the Republic was old-fashioned too. The organization of the trades followed the medieval guild structure, but in economic and social life, the Netherlands was far ahead of the rest of Europe. Or, as Price argues, it was a small, prematurely capitalistic outpost in a Europe that remained mainly medieval.

In a word, since the 1590's these calm territories had been struck by a spirit of courage bordering on euphoria. Amsterdam was well on its way to becoming the financial center of the known world. Throughout society Dutch people shared in the success of trade and shipping. In the stock registers of the Dutch East and West India Companies appear thousands of names, ranging from mayors and merchants to clergymen, school teachers and even servants. The harsh social realities of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were a distant memory.

Still, during that winter of 1608 into 1609, internal tensions about the war with Spain mounted. The most powerful official of the Dutch Republic, Grand Pensionary Van Oldebarneveldt, wanted to rapidly terminate the hostilities that

cost mounds of money and blocked free trade. Yet the stadhouder, Prince Maurits, had aspirations to the throne and wanted to continue fighting in order to “liberate” the Southern Netherlands as well. A raging pamphlet war occurred between the Orangists, or royalists, and Van Oldebarneveldt's peace party.

The power base of the Republic, Amsterdam, supported the Prince, but entirely for its own reasons: the Spaniards were willing to recognize the Republic as a sovereign state if the Dutch agreed to withdraw from Asia and the Atlantic area. Van Oldebarneveldt was not disposed to this strategy, because waging a war and maintaining an army of 60,000 men consumed a great deal of money. Furthermore, he argued, if peace returned, the declining trade with Southern Europe would resume quickly. On the other hand, the merchants of Amsterdam feared a peace treaty would put an end to their new trade in Asia and South America, as well as to their lucrative piracy of Spanish ships. And clergyman Plancius the uncompromising Calvinist and founder of the Dutch East India Company, certainly did not want to hear about peace.

Meanwhile we know very little about the

past of our British sailor. When Henry Hudson turned up in Amsterdam, he was about forty years old, an experienced captain with three sons – his first grandchild had just been born - who in the last years had acquired a certain renown for his quests to find a northern passage to Southeast Asia and China. There were two possible routes: northwest via Canada, or northeast, around Russia. If a northern route existed, it would offer important advantages over the existing route to Asia, around the Cape of Good Hope. It would avoid the problems with the heat, and long-lasting calms, plus the many pirates who waited in ambush along the southern routes. Fifteen years earlier, Dirck Van Os and his fellow merchants had sent out three expeditions to the north, encouraged by Petrus Plancius who was convinced of the possibilities of such a passage.

From behind his globes in the Saint Olof Chapel, Plancius propagated the theory – derived from the British adventurer Robert Thorne – that the five months of continuous sunshine in the pole area had to generate so much heat in the summer that the pole was warmer – even ice free - than the surrounding, southern seas. Behind the cold barrier, blocked by icebergs and other obstacles,

he speculated, a milder zone had to exist.

The last Dutch expedition, led by Willem Barentszoon in 1596, was stranded in the drifting ice of Nova Zembla in the Arctic Ocean. Crew members withstood a horrifying winter in a house built out of wreckage. Twelve members of the crew eventually managed to return to Amsterdam in one piece, with tales that would give chills to many generations of schoolchildren. Thereafter these trips to the north halted.

Eleven years later Henry Hudson tried to find the northern passage, under the auspices of the London Muscovy Company. His first voyage, in 1607, was of an unprecedented foolhardiness: instead of sailing around the pole via the east or west, he tried to go across it. He came within six hundred miles of the pole, he defied storms and even a whale that tried to surface while under his ship, but in the end he noted wryly in his log: “This morning we saw that we were compassed in ice in abundance... And this I can assure at present...by this way there is no passage.” His second expedition in spring 1608 via the northeastern route also failed, after which his patrons deserted him. When the Dutch Consul in London got wind of this predicament - knowing some

Amsterdam merchants were still interested in the northern passage - he referred Hudson to them. Thus our sailor set sail from London, in the spring of 1608, for the Netherlands, at the request of the Amsterdam Chamber of the Dutch East India Company.

For Dirck Van Os and his fellow merchants, a northern passage was once again high on their agenda--this time not for nautical reasons, but to stay ahead of all possible competition, from within as well as from outside the Republic. The facts were that the Dutch East India Company possessed exclusive rights to trade with Asia via the southern routes, but everybody was free to make an attempt by way of the north. Documents show this had worried the Board of Directors for years. So they were interested in Hudson's expedition chiefly for political reasons: a northern passage could be hazardous for their lucrative trade monopoly; consequently they had to be the first to find one. They also knew that if a peace treaty was signed with Spain, they would be forced to find an alternative route to Asia.

Petrus Plancius had his own motives. In Amsterdam the famed cartographer was finally able to compare theory and experience

in conversations with our undaunted explorer. Their exchange of ideas encouraged both Hudson and Plancius tremendously, especially in their speculation on the existence of a relative "warm" polar region. Hudson thought he had seen grazing animals in the far north on previous expeditions, and there were reports about an open sea around the pole.

At the same time as their discussions were occurring, a diplomatic intrigue was unfolding. The huge success of the Dutch East India Company had come to the attention of the French King, Henry IV, who wanted to expand and modernize French trade with a similar enterprise. He had sent expeditions to Canada, but more recently the monarch was intent on Asian trade, possibly via a still-to-be discovered northern route. The French ambassadors in The Hague tried to ferret out as much information as possible from the Dutch – just as Dutch sailors and mapmakers had done earlier with the Portuguese; they even managed to pump Petrus Plancius for particulars.

But their biggest ally turned out to be Isaac Le Maire, the rich and embittered Amsterdam merchant, co-founder of the Dutch East India

Company, who was expelled from the enterprise. Le Maire saw the French initiative that would diminish the monopoly of the Dutch East India Company as the perfect vehicle for revenge. The Dutch East India Company directors were very much aware of this possibility, which fuelled their sense of urgency. Le Maire, who knew exactly why Hudson had been summoned to Amsterdam, approached the sailor directly. Records of a French ambassador show that Le Maire did everything in his power to encourage Hudson to join the service of King Henry IV. Hudson didn't decline initially, and he openly shared with the French the same information he gave to the Dutch East India Company.

Thus a silent war over the explorer took place that fall of 1608. Although the Amsterdam chamber of the Dutch East India Company wanted to send Hudson on his way, despite certain hesitations, they needed permission from their colleagues in other parts of the country, especially from Zeeland. And Le Maire had to suspend talks with Hudson too, since the French rightfully assumed the anticipated armistice with Spain would hurt the Dutch East India Company, without French intervention. This armistice would

put their plans in a whole different perspective.

When the Dutch East India Company got wind of Hudson's double play, they used this opportunity to sign a contract with Hudson. Alarmed, the French King sent Le Maire a vast sum of money to also persuade Hudson to sign a contract, but it was too late. Henry Hudson would set sail under the flag of the Republic, but just barely. History easily might have taken another course.

It was a period of historic fault lines, that winter of 1608 into 1609, as tensions mounted between old and new, modernity and tradition, in ways that would determine the course of history. The plan to construct the canals of Amsterdam was one typical outcome of the fast accumulation of wealth and the style of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Canals were an inventive way to create boulevards along which the citizens would parade, while they would also provide a system of transport and reservoir of the polder water. With this urban plan Amsterdam had to become an ultramodern city with – unique for that time- separate working and living districts. At the same time it remained an old-fashioned water city, in the middle of a swampland, and the street pattern of

the future workman's district, the Jordaan, neatly copied the clever rhythm of polder pathways and ditches that had been the pattern since the Middle Ages in Holland. Despite the breach with the past, the urban society also maintained strong medieval traits. The guild associations continued to exist, as did numerable charitable institution. Since those institutes had to serve a much bigger city than medieval Amsterdam, they grew into— for that time – enormous sizes. The *Aalmoezeniersweeshuis*, an orphanage, frequently lodged more than eight hundred orphans at public expense.

The Dutch East India Company functioned with the same dualism. On the one hand the Company ranked as the world's biggest enterprise during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but at the same time it was run like a medieval polder household. It's no coincidence that hardly any names of individual entrepreneurs and merchants of the famous 17<sup>th</sup> century ended up in the history books because power lay in the hands of a collective: the assembly of the *Heren Zeventien*; the seventeen gentlemen. This board was made up of eight members from Amsterdam, four from Zeeland, and five administrators of smaller cities. Nobody

had the final word; no single authority existed.

As in all the political institutions of the Republic, members of the Dutch East India Company were zealous about “common consent,” or unanimity and consensus. Even as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch had an uncontrollable inclination to assemble and to “polder” or debate until consensus is reached. This inclination based on the collective decision-making they were accustomed to as they worked together to reclaim their wetlands, or polders, in order to develop more usable land. Everything revolved around the art of persuasion, convincing others through debate. A form of democracy prevailed, at least in theory; the Dutch parliament granted the Dutch East India Company rights of monopoly; in turn the Company had to offer the opportunity to all citizens of the Republic the right to buy stock certificates of ownership. Of course, this wasn't always the most efficient method for decisive exercise of power. And that's why the Amsterdam chamber of the Company nearly missed out on Henry Hudson, because they had to wait for permission from Zeeland. But such problems were usually resolved in a flexible way, with the almost innate tendency to compromise,



to scheme, to plot strategies. The established order, which was for the general good, must be preserved. The polder had to remain dry.

The appointment of Henry Hudson was completed in the twilight of the backrooms of the Dutch East India Company filled with compromise and *fait accompli*. If it had been up to Zeeland, as documents later show, the Company would have severed all contacts with Henry Hudson when they discovered his dealings with the French. Hudson also had “big disputes” with quartermaster Dirk Gerritszoon about the pay for some English crew members who would sail with him. Hudson is starting “to mutiny, even under our eyes,” the Zeelanders wrote to their colleagues in Amsterdam. “Imagine what he will do when he is far away from us.”

The Zeeland chamber wanted to press on with the northern expedition but only under command of “an able, wise and experienced person.” Their objection arrived too late: on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1609 the Amsterdam administrators, lead by Dirck Van Os, energized by their rivalry with opponent Le Maire, had already signed the contract with Henry Hudson. According to this deed Hudson got “a small ship or yacht” at his

disposal, well equipped with a crew, provisions and other necessities. He would have to depart in early April to search for a northern passage, round the north of Nova Zembla and then travel southwards again, en route to Asia. Subsequently he would have to return and pass on “all journals, courses, maps and everything that had happened to him during the voyage, without holding anything back.” The modest ship he was allocated was the *Halve Maen*, Half Moon, a triple-masted yacht of 85 feet (26 metres), with a crew of sixteen men. For the entire expedition, his pay was eight hundred guilders at a time when the monthly salary of a captain in the merchant navy was between fifty to sixty guilders. Should he not have returned within a year, the Dutch East India Company would have paid two hundred guilders to his wife, and with that sum be relieved of all further obligations.

Thus our sailor departed from Amsterdam on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1609, to set sail two days later, on April 6, from Texel Island into the North Sea. Three days later the delegates from Spain and the Republic signed a twelve-year armistice. A definitive peace settlement was delayed because

the Netherlands did not want to abandon trade with Asia and America. Only for the duration of the armistice, the merchants of the Republic were prepared to maintain the status quo and refrain from setting up a separate West Indian Company for North and South America. That Company was founded as soon as the armistice with Spain ended.

Hudson's immediate patron, merchant Dirck Van Os, embarked – among many other activities – on a golden career as a polder governor of “his” polder, the Beemster. Another patron, Arent ten Grootenhuys, is portrayed proudly in front of his company of riflemen in a painting in the gallery of the Amsterdam Historical Museum. Their opponent, Isaac Le Maire, left the city two years later after his speculations misfired. Later he founded an Australian Company, a counterpart of the Dutch East India Company, and a newly discovered strait near Vuurland, at the tip of South America, was named the Strait Le Maire. On his tombstone in the town church of Egmond-Binnen he had inscribed that he had been “blessed abundantly by the Lord,” because though he had lost more than one and a half million guilders in thirty years, he

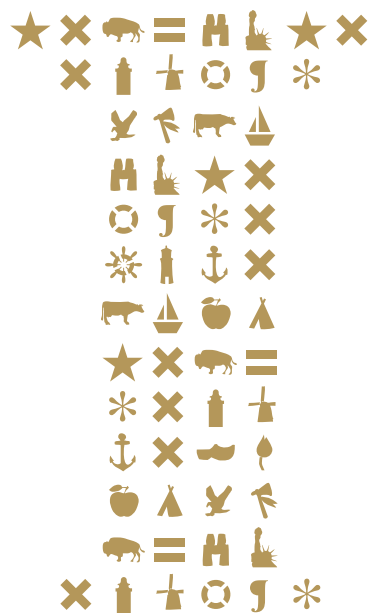
had kept his honor. The clergyman and mapmaker Petrus Plancius would, together with the stern and powerful merchant mayor Reynier Pauw, in later years play a major part in the fall of Grand Pensionary Van Oldebarneveldt and thereafter in his execution on charge of “high treason” in 1619. The events read like a Shakespearian tragedy. But religious issues, as often in the Netherlands, only seemed to predominate. Underneath the veneer of religion lay commercial motives. Pauw and his followers turned against Van Oldenbarneveldt and his peace policy mainly because a treaty with the Spaniards was commercially inconvenient for them. Not until 1648 would Amsterdam agree to a peace treaty.

In the years to come Amsterdam would blossom into the seventeenth century version of New York, a city of novelty, bubbling with life and creativity, linked with all parts of the known world – if only for a while.

For his part, Henry Hudson Hudson sailed off into the sea. Never again would he return to Amsterdam.

# The Accidental Legacy of Henry Hudson

By Russell Shorto



It was getting harder to stay alive with each passing hour. Somehow, amid the pitching of the waves, the first mate managed to pick up a pen to scratch the date – the nineteenth of May, 1609 – and record a few words in the log: “Much trouble with fogges, sometimes, and more dangerous of Ice... with much wind and snow and very cold.” They had been at sea more than a month – sixteen or so men in a small wooden ship – at first uneventfully, but as they edged toward the pole, heading northeast along the coast of Norway, they sailed into “close stormie weather,” and as it intensified the men approached the limits of endurance. Alone in an

unforgiving universe of heaving seas and low sky, the crew – half English and half Dutch – became bitterly divided. Mutiny darkened the air. Their objective was to find a shortcut to the riches of Asia. The instructions from their masters, the Dutch East India Company in Amsterdam, were unusually clear: they were to take a northeast route, skirting the pole, through the icy waters of northern Russia. The contract specifically ordered their captain that he “think of discovering no other routes” than this. What was to be done now? Turn around and head back to port, admitting failure? Push onward somehow, into an increasing likelihood of death?

A wise old historian once told me that his greatest professional frustration had to do with the one-word question *why*? Historical records – immigration forms, ships’ logs, wills – give us names, ages, deeds, but rarely explain why people emigrated, explored, loved, went to war, and otherwise made important decisions. We know a lot about the human past, but often people fail to record this simple thing, the most human thing, the key to our dreams and our inner hearts.

Henry Hudson, English explorer, left

behind no direct answer to the question of why he did what he did during the course of his adventurous life. We are left to surmise it from the deeds themselves and the way he conducted himself. And yet, I think we can get a pretty clear idea of what drove him across the globe, of the force that impelled this dark, brooding, dogged man and led him – albeit unwittingly – to alter the course of human history.

This was not the first time that Hudson would be faced with near-mutiny, and it would not be the last. There was a grimness about him, a hard inexorability. Some explorers from the great era of discovery were outsized personalities. The Italian Giovanni Cabotto (aka John Cabot), for example, regaled citizens of his adopted city of London with flamboyant tales of his exploits, and promised people he met in pubs that he would name newly discovered islands after them. Hudson exhibited no such charm. His chief trait was constancy: he was an unrelenting hunter, a seeker after the scope of the earth. His one dream was to find a short route to Asia.

And he was willing to do almost anything to achieve that dream. He had previously made several attempts of stupendous effort,

including trying to sail straight over the North Pole. Now, amid the noise of wind, he told his crew that he would violate his orders, change course and sail the little vessel westward – across the Atlantic. Based in part on letters from his friend John Smith, who was even now fighting for survival along with other members of the Jamestown colony in Virginia, Hudson had become convinced that the best chance of success in the quest to reach the Sea of Japan was straight through what we now know to be the staggeringly vast expanse of North America. The absurdity of this is mitigated somewhat when we consider that at the time the best calculation of the size of the earth was still that of the Greek geographer Ptolemy, who had estimated it to be about one-third smaller than it actually is. So it was reasonable for a mariner like Hudson to reckon that the portion of the earth no one knew about – the American west and much of the Pacific Ocean – simply didn't exist. Further, John Smith had told him of a channel somewhere to the north of the Virginia colony that cut through the land mass. This, Hudson concluded, must be a path between the Atlantic and Pacific. In today's terms, his idea was that he would sail a

channel that cut through the northeastern states of the United States and, instead of reaching, say, Ohio, he would find himself bearing down on the Japanese coast.

The boldness, the epic pig-headedness and determination of men such as Hudson beggars the imagination today. There on the deck of the *Half Moon*, amid the roiling gray-black waters of the North Sea, he convinced his men that he was right. It would have been relatively easy for them to believe him: they were programmed to think their captain was a special human being, someone who *knew things*, and there would surely have been great comfort in yielding to that trust. Only Hudson himself would have known how flimsy was the foundation for his belief.

So they changed everything and set off on a new course, straight across the Atlantic – and, as they say, into history. This improvised part of the voyage was far less treacherous. By the second of July they had reached the great fishing bank off Newfoundland. From there they veered southward, and continued all the way to present-day Virginia, where Hudson’s friend John Smith was. Hudson didn’t venture into the Chesapeake Bay, however, but headed back northward, on

the lookout now for the channel that he believed would lead to Asia. They found one likely candidate – the Delaware River – but it was too shallow. On the fourth of September they entered “a very good Harbour” where they caught “ten great Mullets, of a foot and a halfe long a peece, and a Ray as great as foure men could hale into the ship.” It was New York Harbor. Because the river they then followed – which would of course later take its name from Hudson – is a tidal river, and thus salty, Hudson had reason to believe he was in a channel between two oceans. The whole region enchanted them. “The River is a mile broad,” the first mate wrote, and “there is very high Land on both sides... The land is the finest for cultivation that I have ever in my life set foot upon.”

They encountered natives in several places, and traded with some and fought with others. They continued past Manhattan Island and on up, all the way to north of present-day Albany, before realizing that the bed was narrowing and the water no longer salty. This was not the route to Asia. Hudson gave the order to turn about. They sailed back to Europe.

In England – where Hudson had put into

harbor en route back to the Dutch Republic – a new adventure began. Hudson was arrested for having sailed “to the detriment of his country.” His ship’s log was confiscated. Spies circled around his crew, sniffing for information. Hudson’s account of limitless timber, of beavers and foxes, of a world-class harbor, got the attention of the English rulers, and also of Dutch merchant-adventurers, who began to plan expeditions to explore the new region.

Hudson himself, however, had little interest in these things. For him, North America was merely a vast obstacle in the path to the true goal. By the next sailing season he had won new backing, from England, and set off again toward North America, this time in search of a northwest passage he expected to find at a higher latitude, through northern Canada. He cajoled and tongue-lashed his crew through more hellish expanses of ice, refusing to hear their growing chorus of laments, until, finally, on June 22, 1611, the men, weakened by scurvy and hunger, had had enough. At the far southern edge of the vast stretch of icy water that would later become known as Hudson Bay, they set Hudson, several crewmembers who had remained loyal to him, and Hudson’s young

son John, who had chosen the wrong voyage on which to accompany his father, into the ship’s small accompanying shallop. Sometime after the mutineers set sail they could see the shallop behind them sailing gamely, but the small boat was not meant for sea voyages; in time, the rebel sailors lost sight of it. They returned to England, and were soon embroiled in court cases. Henry Hudson – who would make history of a kind he had never imagined – died an icy death, a victim of his own obsession, having failed to achieve the only objective that ever mattered to him.

Probably it was not two individuals but two small groups of men who met on a quietly fateful day in 1626 in a roughly constructed fort on the edge of the limitless expanse of North American wilderness. One comprised Dutch soldiers. The other was made up of Mahican Indians, their hair long and “coarse as a horse’s tail,” as one writer would put it, and likely wearing deerskins tied around the waist. In the years immediately after Henry Hudson’s voyage, on the basis of which the Dutch Republic laid claim to a wide swath of the eastern seaboard of the North American continent, a few Dutch

expeditions reached the area, charting and doing small amounts of trade with native groups. Then, in 1621, with the end of a 12-year truce in the long war of independence the Dutch were waging against the Spanish Empire, a new concern was established. The Dutch East India Company – which had funded Hudson’s voyage – had proved very successful at doing business in Asia. Now the newly formed Dutch West India Company hoped to do the same. Its mission was twofold: to extract products from North America as well as the Caribbean and South America, and to fight the Spanish in those regions. It was in this context that the WIC organized a colony in the region sailed by Hudson, using his voyage as the basis for the Dutch claim to the area. They called the colony New Netherland. In contemporary terms, it stretched from Albany, New York, to the Delaware River in the south, and comprised all or parts of five future American states: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut and Delaware.

Beginning in 1624 and 1625 the first groups of settlers and traders went out from the United Provinces (as the Dutch Republic was also called). The Dutch idea of laying

claim to territory involved occupation, so even though these first settlement groups were tiny – numbering in the fives and tens – they were spread out across this vast region: a few up the North River (which would later be named the Hudson River), a few further south on the same river, a few at what they called the Fresh River (later the Connecticut River), a few more at the aptly named South River (now the Delaware). They built very primitive homes by digging pits, lining them with wood and covering them with bark, and got to work clearing and tilling land and establishing relations with the Indians with whom they would trade for beaver and other pelts.

All went reasonably well the first year. Then one day in 1626 the Mahicans came into Fort Orange, the Dutch settlement far up the North River, and made a proposal to its commander, Daniel van Crieckenbeeck. The Mahicans were in a longstanding, on-again, off-again feud with the Mohawk Indians. The Mahican leader proposed to Van Crieckenbeeck that the Dutch and Mahicans enter an alliance; each would help the other if attacked. Since the Dutch traded with the Mahicans, Van



Crieckenbeeck thought it a sound idea, and agreed. Shortly after, seven Dutchmen joined a Mahican party as they marched into the forest to scout the Mohawk. A battle ensued, and four of the Dutchmen, including Van Crieckenbeeck, were killed.

News of the killings rippled through the farflung Dutch settlements, and caused a panic. To the south, another group of settlers was clustered on a dot of an island in the harbor that the Dutch called Noten Island (later Governor's Island), which had been picked out to be the capital of the colony. There had been minor turmoil here, as the settlers were unhappy with their leader. They chose a new one, named Peter Minuit, and at around the same time news of the Indian killings to the north reached them. Minuit acted almost at once. He had realized both that Noten Island was too small to serve as a base and that the idea of spreading tiny groups of settlers across hundreds of miles of territory was foolhardy. The Indian attack spurred him to action. He recalled all the farflung settlers, and he repositioned them, together, on the larger island a stone's throw from Noten Island, deciding that it would better serve as a capital. The Indians

called it, in their language, "island of hills," or Manahatta. Shortly thereafter, Minuit negotiated a treaty with the Indians for it. This treaty was long ago lost, but some months after this historic event occurred a ship from New Netherland arrived in the Dutch Republic bringing word of it. A Dutch government officer named Peter Schaghen documented the contents of the ship, and wrote a letter giving government leaders the news. The so-called Schaghen letter has become one of history's more remarkable documents, for it indicates so sharply and prosaically this moment in time:

*High and Mighty Lords,*

*Yesterday the ship the Arms of Amsterdam arrived here. It sailed from New Netherland out of the River Mauritius on the 23d of September. They report that our people are in good spirit and live in peace. The women also have borne some children there. They have purchased the Island Manhattes from the Indians for the value of 60 guilders. It is 11,000 morgens in size. They had all their grain sowed by the middle of May, and reaped by the middle*

*of August. They sent samples of these summer grains: wheat, rye, barley, oats, buckwheat, canary seed, beans and flax. The cargo of the aforesaid ship is:*

*7246 Beaver skins*

*178½ Otter skins*

*675 Otter skins*

*48 Mink skins*

*36 Lynx skins*

*33 Minks*

*34 Muskrat skins*

*Many oak timbers and nut wood.*

*Herewith,*

*High and Mighty Lords, be commended to the mercy of the Almighty,*

*In Amsterdam, the 5<sup>th</sup> of November Anno 1626*

*Your High and Mightinesses' obedient,*

*P.Schaghen*

It wasn't a "sale" in the European sense; Minuit surely knew that for the Indians the 60 guilders' worth of goods he gave (which a 19<sup>th</sup> century historian famously calculated at 24 dollars) was not an outright payment but a token

of alliance. The Indian idea was of a defensive alliance: the Europeans would be entitled to use Manhattan Island, and at the same time if either side was attacked the other would come to its aid.

Thus reformed, the colony of New Netherland began to grow. More settlers arrived. The capital at the southern tip of Manhattan – appropriately named New Amsterdam after its parent city – became a city, if a rough and motley one. Streets were laid out, houses went up (with proper Dutch gables). There was a church and a fort – and a remarkable number of taverns for so small a place. Indeed, New Amsterdam quickly developed a reputation for semi-lawlessness. It became a base for prosecuting the war against Spanish ships in the Caribbean: Dutch captains who were authorized to take Spanish and Portuguese prizes – legalized piracy, you might say – brought the captured ships to New Amsterdam. Some of them contained slaves, which is how slavery began on Manhattan. Fullfledged pirates became part of the community as well. Prostitution was a mainstay. Indeed, one of the legendary couples of New Amsterdam comprised a Dutch-Moroccan pirate named Anthony Van Salee (a.k.a. The Turk) and the

town's first prostitute, Griet Reyniers. In a nice microcosm of the way the colony would mature, after causing moral outrage for some years, this couple eventually became leading citizens: they married, had four children, became one of the principle landowning families of Breuckelen (later Brooklyn), and spawned generations of New Yorkers.

New Amsterdam stayed stagnant and semi-lawless for years after its founding, largely because the West India Company maintained a monopoly on trade. No one was allowed to make money from trading with the Indians unless they were acting as WIC agents; but the WIC's structure was too rigid to allow it to exploit the colony. In the vacuum, smuggling became a main occupation. Finally, in 1640, the company gave up its monopoly, and from that date the colony began to flourish. Trading firms in Amsterdam set up branch offices in New Amsterdam. Individuals went out among the tribes along the Hudson and Mohawk rivers and struck deals. More ships appeared in the harbor. New Amsterdam began to grow.

Then it all collapsed. In a reaction to minor skirmishes with Indian groups, the director of the colony, Willem Kieft, decided to declare an all-

out war on the natives. Settlers were outraged. For one thing, they were vastly outnumbered by the Indians. For another, they were there to do business with them. But Kieft persisted, and sent WIC soldiers on brutal raids. In reaction, Indians attacked European settlements, burning and killing. "Kieft's War" brought the fledgling colony to its knees. Most importantly for history, it convinced the inhabitants of New Amsterdam that they could not expect the WIC to look out for their interests. They appointed a group of nine men as their representatives. The WIC sent a new director to the colony, a vigorous, disciplined company man named Peter Stuyvesant. Immediately on his arrival in the spring of 1647, the nine unofficial representatives of the community – led by Adriaen Van der Donck, a young lawyer who had trained at Leiden University, the premier academic institution in the Dutch Republic – put their case before him. Stuyvesant and Van der Donck locked horns, Stuyvesant insisting on his right to run the colony by fiat, Van der Donck urging the newly evolving rights of individuals. At the climax of the confrontation, Stuyvesant ordered Van der Donck put under house arrest, and even threatened to

have him executed for treason.

Ultimately, Van der Donck was released, and he led a delegation to the Dutch Republic, where he put the case of the colony before the government in The Hague. His appeal was that the government take direct control of the colony. He asked the rulers to recognize the value of this real estate they controlled. It sat alongside the vast North American wilderness, which in the coming decades could become a source of untold wealth and potential. All the Dutch leaders had to do was realize this, and assert their rights to it. If they did not, Van der Donck warned, the English – who had colonies at Virginia to the south and New England to the north, and whose members were already encroaching on New Netherland – would eventually take over.

The members of the government took Van der Donck seriously; they ordered Stuyvesant's recall, and considered ways to reinforce the colony. But almost immediately after, the English government launched a trade war against Dutch interests, and the order was rescinded. The only part of the order that remained in effect was one that granted New Amsterdam the status of an official Dutch city.

But that order would have lasting significance – the chartering of New Amsterdam in 1653 remains the official date of New York City's chartering – as indeed would the colony as a whole. One of the unique features of the Dutch Republic in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was its mixed character. Over the previous centuries, the “Low Countries” had become the melting pot of Europe. Dutch cities had unusually high concentrations of minorities. In an age of religious strife, it was almost universally held that a nation should be of one people and one faith. Intolerance was thus official policy in England, Spain, France...but not in the Dutch nation. There, tolerance became a topic of political and religious debate. Tolerance was adopted as policy – not as a grand ideal, but as a way to deal with the mixed character of the population. This had its roots in the previous century, when the Dutch provinces suffered violence under the Spanish Inquisition; one result was the declaration in the Union of Utrecht of 1579 that “each person shall remain free, especially in his religion, and that no one shall be persecuted or investigated because of their religion.”

This clause would have considerable

consequences in the New World. For one thing, it helped ensure that right from the start the colony was a mixed community, comprising Germans, Swedes, Italians and others. Then too, several times Peter Stuyvesant tried to bar groups from settling in New Netherland on the grounds that their religion would bring unrest. In 1654, Jews appealed his ruling in the home country and won. Then when English Quakers wanted to settle in the village of Vlissingen (called Flushing by the English) on Long Island, Stuyvesant again tried to bar them, and the English inhabitants also appealed his ruling. Tolerance – “the glory of the Outward State of Holland,” in the words of the petition – meant the Dutch colony should allow all religious groups to settle. Again, the Dutch authorities sided with the petitioners. This document, called the Flushing Remonstrance, has gone down in American history as the originating source of religious freedom in the United States.

In 1664, Adriaen van der Donck’s fears were realized. An English gunboat flotilla entered the harbor and took aim at the fort at the tip of Manhattan Island. Stuyvesant reluctantly gave up his command and his colony. New Amsterdam became New York City. Beverwijck,

the second city, 150 miles upriver, saw its name changed to Albany. Dutch rule in North America came to an end.

As far as American and Dutch history was concerned, the Dutch legacy in North America also came to an end in 1664. As the American colonies developed, they were seen as English in language and culture. In 1776, when those colonies declared their independence, it was an all-English affair: Anglo settlements breaking free from England. The Dutch presence was by then a distant memory.

But the influence of the Dutch presence continued. That influence is still apparent in many small ways. Americans eat cookies instead of biscuits because the Dutch of New Amsterdam made *koekjes*. The American Santa Claus has its origins in the Dutch *Sinterklaas*. The word “boss” entered the English language via the New Netherland colony from the Dutch *baas*. More significantly, the Dutch Republic in the 17<sup>th</sup> century pioneered concepts of business and trade, including the idea of shares of stock to reduce risk, as well as the notion of tolerance as a social glue to undergird a mixed society. Both of these features – free trade and an immigrant

culture – took root in New Amsterdam, and then in New York. They ensured that as New York developed under English rule, it would be a very different place from Boston, Hartford, or any other city in English North America. When hordes of European immigrants arrived in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they landed largely in New York. They looked at its teeming society – its dense immigrant mixture and its vigorous pursuit of trade – and took that combination to be quintessentially American. As they moved westward – to Ohio, Indiana, Montana, California – they brought the idea with them. In this way did the willfulness of Henry Hudson, the legacy of New Netherland, and the deeds of Stuyvesant and Van der Donck – not to mention Anthony Van Salee and Griet Reyniers – evolve and spread, as the song says, from sea to shining sea.

And where are we now? Is it possible to follow a thread that runs from that past into our present: that connects Henry Hudson to the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Thanks to Hudson, the city of Amsterdam bequeathed a legacy to New York, centered on the idea of tolerance, and in so doing

spawned a new type of society. Is that legacy still apparent in the two cities?

In one sense there is reason for skepticism. With the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks (and it's worth noting that the World Trade Center towers stood at the edge of what was once New Amsterdam), New York changed, as did much of the world. American society hunkered down; so did Dutch society. In Amsterdam, there was for a time a new inward-looking posture, and a sharp rise in anti-immigration sentiments in what has long been Europe's most tolerant society.

But in a larger sense, have things really changed so much? If you look carefully at events in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, you find that the Dutch invention of tolerance came about in the midst of enormous upheaval and turmoil. The course of that century was one of religious warfare punctuated by periods of peace and prosperity. It was in those tranquil periods that Dutch society, feeling secure, developed and encouraged the idea of tolerance of others. Then, with the advent of war, society closed down, became more conservative and fearful and restrictive. The same cycle has occurred in our time. We live

in a period of transition, of questioning of old verities, a time of hopefulness freighted with anxiety.

But for all the anxiety, the fruits of 17<sup>th</sup> century Amsterdam and New York are fully evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cities. Turbans and yarmulkes, Cyrillic and Cantonese, turmeric and clove: the cityscape is a palette of tolerance. But is this not the palette of every modern city? Indeed it is, and there lies the larger point to be made: these features that Amsterdam in some way pioneered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and transferred to New Amsterdam, and from there to New York, making for the first multiethnic New World city, are ubiquitous now. They are part of every modern city, part of the definition of modern society. We might consider that that is what began in 1609, with the unlikely, brooding, mist-shrouded figure of Henry Hudson, and the development shortly after he passed from the scene of a brashly multiethnic and freetrading city on a blank slate of an island. “How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in it!” So extolled Hudson’s contemporary William Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, composed right around the time Hudson

was freezing to death in Canada. The term “new world” became fashionable in the era, and was applied to the Americas. Today we all live in that new world, regardless of our continent. How bravely we do is up to us.

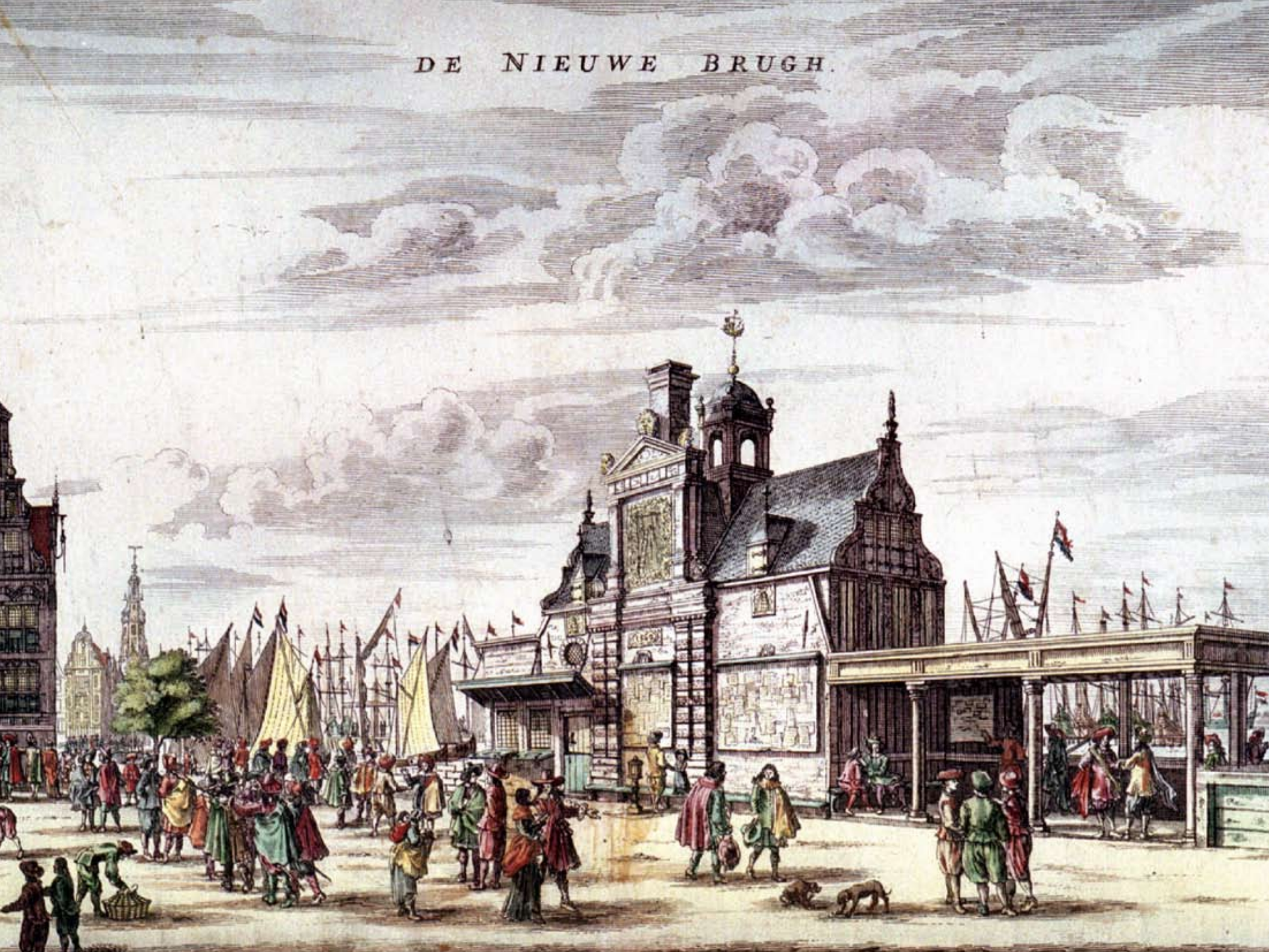
Page 64, 65: View of the New Bridge in Amsterdam, after a painting of Jan Beerstraten, approx. 1640, Amsterdam Stock Exchange Foundation

Page 66, 67: View of New Amsterdam by Johannes Vingboons, 1664, Dutch National Archives, Den Haag.

Page 68, 69: The letter of Pieter Schaghen on the ‘purchase’ of the island of Manhattes, 5 november 1626, Dutch National Archives, Den Haag.

Page 70, 71: View of Amstel by Pieter Nolpe and J. Esselens, 1650, City Archive Amsterdam.

DE NIEUWE BRUGH.





NIEUW AMSTERDAM OFTE NIEUW IORX OPT TEYLANDT MAN





2005  
Accepte van den 1626  
Hooghe Moghende Heeren

NYKS  
CHIEF.

Ziek is gisteren t'beest twaalen van Amsterdam  
aangekomen ende is des 23<sup>en</sup> septem. met reise terug  
= Lant gezegt met de Heere Mauritius. rapporteert  
dat ons volcke daer kelout is in vreesdijg Lijp  
sake koudes ghebes ooc kindes alreik gebakt  
ghebes t'ylant manketter van de wold gheest, voer  
de waerde van 60. gul. is groot 11000 mazz.  
ghebeside alle kore galf meij gezegt, indt galf  
augusto gemayd. daer van zeyndende minstebale  
van zomere kore, als tarwe, rogge, gaxff, gabik  
bouweijt. knaerzait, boontjens in vlas.

Het Carafoen van t'afz schip is

7246 boksels welle  
178½ ottels welle  
675. ottels welle  
18. mambel welle  
36. Gallofs welle  
33 mambel  
34 halte welle.

Wese gheken balde, in Noten gant.

Ziek mede

Zoogge mogghide ghebes, zyt ds demoghid  
in genade b'kops.

In Amsterdam den 5<sup>en</sup> novem a<sup>o</sup> 1626.

Geve Moo: Moo: Dienstwillighe

Schaghen