

New Netherland: The Short-Lived Dutch Settlement

While John Smith was struggling to save the colony of Jamestown, an English sailor named Henry Hudson was exploring the coastline farther north for the Netherlands. Henry Hudson's voyage was sponsored by Dutch merchants who hoped to find the Northwest Passage. (The people of the Netherlands are called the Dutch.)



In 1609, Hudson discovered a deep river full of fish and thought it might just take him all the way across the continent. It didn't, of course, but he claimed the land along its banks for the Netherlands. The river was later named the Hudson in his honor, and the territory he claimed became known as New Netherland.

In 1621, Dutch merchants formed the Dutch West India Company to start a colony in America. The first Dutch colonists settled along the upper Hudson, where they built Fort Orange, near present-day Albany, New York. The new colonists quickly found that there were good profits to be made in the fur trade. They established trading posts along the Hudson River. The largest was on Manhattan Island at the river's mouth.

Relations with American Indians In 1626, the Dutch West India Company sent Peter Minuit (MIN yu-what) to New Netherland as the colony's governor. Wanting peaceful relations with the Indians, the company told Minuit that any native peoples on Manhattan Island "must not be expelled with violence or threats but be persuaded with kind words . . . or should be given something."

Following orders, Minuit offered the island's Indians iron pots, beads, and blankets worth about \$24 in exchange for their land. The American Indians didn't believe that anyone could own land. Laughing at the foolishness of the white men, they made the trade.

Dutch traders also made deals with members of the powerful Iroquois Confederacy, an alliance of five Indian groups who lived across the northern portion of New Netherland. The French had long supplied the Huron, the Iroquois's great rivals, with guns in exchange for

furs. It made sense for the Iroquois to become partners with the Dutch, who supplied them with the weapons they needed to stand up to the Huron.

This partnership also made sense for the Dutch. The French were their main rivals in the European fur trade. For most of the 1600s, the Iroquois kept the French from moving into the fur-rich Ohio Valley.

New Amsterdam As the fur trade expanded, the Dutch settlement on Manhattan swelled to over 1,000 people. In 1647, the Dutch West India Company hired Peter Stuyvesant (STY-vuh-sunt) as the colony's new governor. When he arrived at Manhattan, Stuyvesant declared that the settlement would be called New Amsterdam, after the capital city of the Netherlands.

Stuyvesant had lost his right leg in battle, and he stomped around on a wooden leg decorated with silver nails. People called him "Old Silvernails" or "Peg Leg Pete." Although he was a strong leader, Old Silvernails was generally disliked. When Dutchmen who had been elected as city councilors disagreed with him, he called them "ignorant subjects" and threatened to ship them back to the Netherlands in pieces if they gave him trouble.

Despite his reputation as a grouch, Stuyvesant governed New Amsterdam for 17 years. During this time, he captured a nearby Swedish colony and invited its settlers to live in New Amsterdam. By 1660, the colony had nearly 8,000 people, including Europeans from many nations as well as enslaved Africans. New Amsterdam also provided refuge for Jews who were seeking a place to practice their religion freely.



New Netherland Becomes New

York Stuyvesant's biggest problem was that the English wanted to drive the Dutch out of North America. England's king, Charles II, refused to recognize Dutch claims to New Netherland. In 1664, Charles gave his brother, James, the Duke of York, ownership of all

Dutch lands in America—if he could conquer them.

James promptly organized a small invasion fleet to take the colony. When the English arrived, they sent Stuyvesant a letter demanding his surrender. Stuyvesant tore up the note and refused to consider giving up until New Amsterdam's chief gunner reported that the city's supply of gunpowder was damp and useless. Without firing a shot, the English took over New Netherland and renamed the colony New York