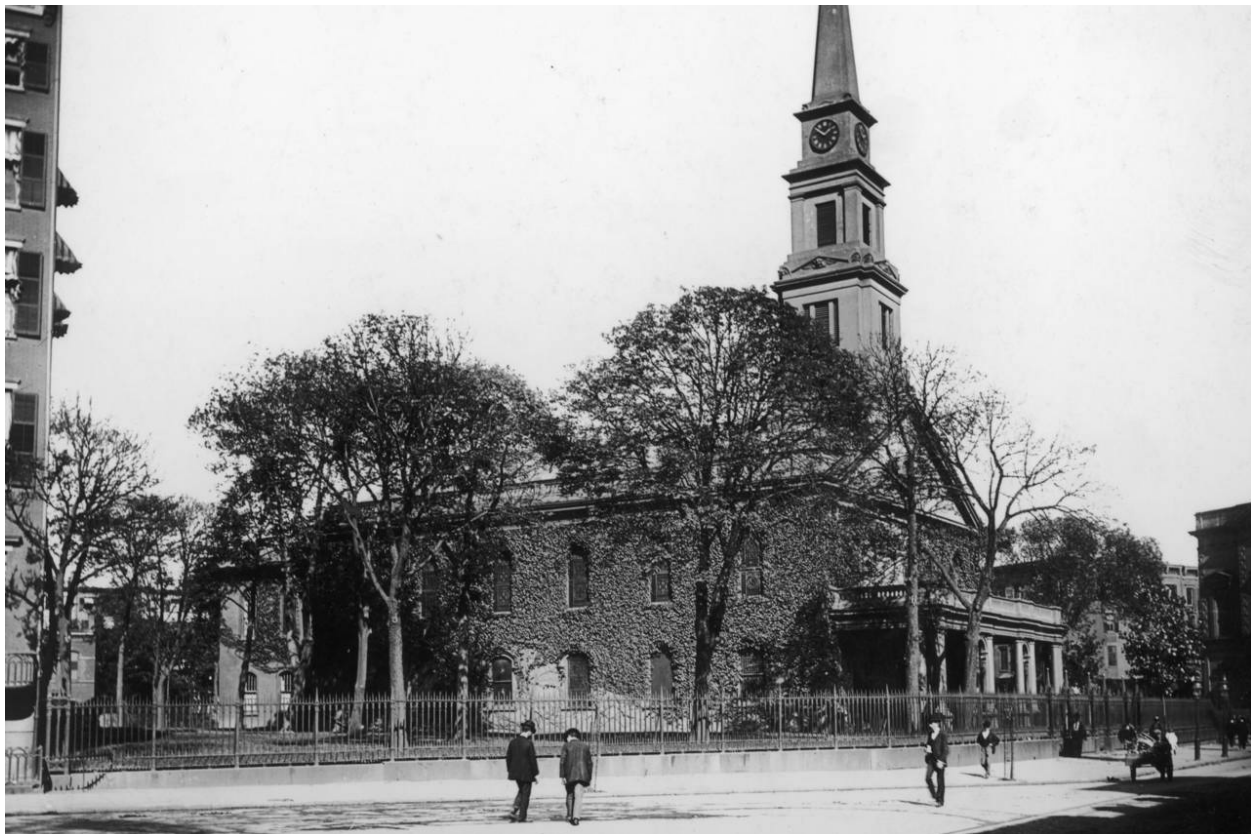


THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Make Way for Those Holland Dames

A look at the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, one of the oldest genealogical organizations



St. Mark's in-the-Bowery, circa 1895

Photo: Getty Images

By Ralph Gardner Jr.

Oct. 21, 2015

© Wall Street Journal

The Society of Daughters of Holland Dames is donating the Govert Loockermans 1664 land patent, signed by Peter Stuyvesant, to the New-York Historical Society.

A reception was on for Tuesday evening, but first things first. Who or what is the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames?

I've heard of the Mayflower Society, officially the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. But the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames is a new one.

"We're one of the oldest genealogical and patriotic organizations," explained Elbrun Kimmelman, the group's directress general, as we stood in the board room of the New-York Historical Society last week and admired Peter Stuyvesant's impressive signature on the land-patent document.

The purpose of the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, which was founded in 1895, is to perpetuate the memory and promote the virtues of its members' Dutch ancestors. Those virtues apparently being the sort of democratic instincts and entrepreneurial zeal that distinguished New Amsterdam and rippled down through the centuries to present-day New York City.

And how does one become a member of the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames?

"You have to be able to trace [your lineage] through birth and marriage and burial" records, Ms. Kimmelman said. "Fortunately, I didn't have to go back to 1644 because earlier relatives had."

The directress general added modestly that she had only "a drop" of Dutch blood, but apparently percentages don't matter.

"My ancestor was Pieter Slotd. He was a surgeon who had a land grant on the edge of Stuyvesant's farm. That's where St. Mark's Church is in the Bowery."

The church, at 10th Street and Second Avenue, is also where Stuyvesant is buried. He was the last director-general of New Amsterdam, before surrendering the colony to the English in 1664. The English renamed the place New York.



Elbrun Kimmelman with the land patent Photo: Ralph Gardner/The Wall Street Journal

Displaying an appalling ignorance of our city's history before, say, 1953, I was surprised to learn Stuyvesant, whose importance in the early days of our metropolis can't be overstated, was buried in the Bowery.

Though I don't know where else he would be buried. After ceding the city to the English, he spent the rest of his life on his 62-acre farm in what today might be called the suburbs. St. Mark's in-the-Bowery is on the site of the former Stuyvesant family chapel.

"He's buried with all the important people of the time, including with all the English governors who followed him," Ms. Kimmelman reported.

Loockermans, one of the founding fathers of New Amsterdam, was a rags-to-riches tale; he's described as a cunning merchant.

"Because he was really disliked, despite all his wealth his name faded," Ms. Kimmelman said.

As pleased as the New-York Historical Society was to receive the Loockermans land patent, Ms. Kimmelman said it was perhaps even more excited—"tickled" is the word she used—to acquire the frame that came with the document.

The rustic frame, which was described as looking like "a cuckoo-clock frame," was made from a pear tree that Stuyvesant imported from Holland in 1647. It survived until 1867 at the corner of East 13th Street and Third Avenue, in the vicinity of what contemporary New Yorkers may recognize as Kiehl's Pharmacy.

"It grew pears for 200 years until a truck backed into it," Ms. Kimmelman said. Horse drawn, no doubt.

However, my interest in the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, which has more than 200 members, transcended the land patent and went to the very workings of the organization.

"We don't have any real estate," Ms. Kimmelman said. "We meet in each other's homes." She added, with perhaps the slightest hint of mortification, that unlike other clubs that struggle to survive, "We do very well with our investments."

Some of the proceeds are used to promote and preserve Dutch culture. And more important, to leverage their donations in ways that bring the values of the original Dutch settlers back into the limelight and contribute to solving contemporary problems.

Indeed, getting the most for every dollar goes to the very heart of the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames's ethos and is apparently a foundational Dutch value.

"'Dutch treat' means you're both going to pay your way and nobody is going to sponge off me," Ms. Kimmelman said. "You should do your part."