

Early Dutch New York history preserved by

The Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, Descendants of the Ancient and Honorable Families of New Netherland

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Introduction and History

In September 1609 Henry Hudson stood on the deck of his ship, the *Halve Maen* (*Half Moon*), as it glided into the sparkling waters surrounding an island that the Lenape Indians called *Mannahatta* (“island of many hills”). Here, in 1624, the Dutch would found the capital of their New Netherland Colony. In 1895, to perpetuate the memory of their ancestors and their remarkable

history, a group of descendants of the early Dutch families formed the “Society of Daughters of Holland Dames, Descendants of the Ancient and Honorable Families of New Netherland.”

Henry Hudson, an English sea captain, was searching for a northwest passage to India under the flag of the Dutch East India Company. Sailing up a particularly wide river as far as he could go, he claimed the entire Hudson River Valley for the Dutch. A few years later Dutch traders returned with Huguenot Walloons

COURTESY OF LENTANTILLO

to settle and do business. Landing first on what is now Governors Island, they moved on to a better position at the southern tip of *Mannahatta*. By 1628 the settlers, led by Peter Minuit, had struck a bargain with the Lenape tribe, purchasing the land (approximately 22,000 acres) for goods worth 60 Dutch guilders (about \$500 today). This transaction, which laid the foundation for the city of New York, was to change the course of world history.

The Dutch named their capital New Amsterdam. It thrived due to

Manhattan 1660. Painting by Len Tantillo, www.lftantillo.com.

the colonists’ hard work, mercantile pragmatism and secular broad-minded attitudes that reflected the ideas of their homeland, and which not only encouraged trade but deeply influenced developing American values. The Colony’s sovereignty, however, was short-lived. Preferring trade to fighting, the Dutch under Governor Petrus Stuyvesant ceded their rule to the British in 1664, only 40 years



Viotor family celebrating the rededication of *The Arrival of the Halve Maen, 1609*, at the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library in 2011. Its restoration was made possible by the Viotor Family Foundation.

plan was to write a history of the world, but as that became too laborious he focused on the period of Dutch “domination” of New York, “at that time almost a ‘terra incognita’ in history.” “I was surprised,” he continued, “to find how few of my fellow-citizens were aware that New York had even been called New Amsterdam, or had heard of the names of its early Dutch governors, or cared a straw about their ancient Dutch progenitors.” By way of apology for his work, in response to “deserved rebuke from men of soberer minds,” he observes “that if it has taken an unwarrantable liberty with our early provincial history, it has at least turned attention to that history and provoked research.” Washington Irving also inspired the founding in 1835 of the prestigious Saint Nicholas Society of the City of New York, named after the patron saint of the Netherlands. Members must prove their descent from an ancestor who lived in the

after its founding. Despite the short-lived independence of the Colony, its impact on the cultural development of our country was profound, bringing to American soil the concepts of individual liberty and enterprise, enlightened thought, religious freedom and multicultural tolerance. Governor Stuyvesant and his Council negotiated the rare privilege of religious freedom for the people of New Amsterdam, who were allowed to “keep and enjoy the liberty of their consciences in religion.” The city was renamed New York after James, Duke of York, brother of King Charles II, and the Treaty of Westminster in 1674 sealed the British rule of New York.

While New York was no longer a Dutch colony, the Dutch people remained and continued to immigrate, settle, do business and make their mark. Many of the names of the earliest settlers are known today for their own and their descendants’ historic achievements and prominence: Beekman, Bogardus, Brinckerhoff, DeSille, Haring, Hermans, Hoorn, Loockermans, Melyn, Rapalje, Riker, Schenck, Schuyler, Slodt, Steynmets, Stuyvesant, Ten Eyck, Updyke, Van Blarcom, Van Buren, Van Cortlandt, Van Kouwenhoven, Vanderbilt, Van Der Donk, Van Der Poel, Van Pelt, Van Rensselaer, Van Sweringen, Verveelen, Voorhees, Waldron, Wessels, and Wyckoff, to name a few.

For a long time, the consensus among historians was that any role the Dutch had played in colonial history was minimal. Washington Irving brought the Dutch back to life in parodies published in 1809 in his famous Knickerbocker series. In the introduction to his 1860 Revised Edition of *The History of New York, From the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*, he explained that his original

State of New York prior to 1785, which was about the time Irving’s family had immigrated to New York. Saint Nicholas has become a symbol of generosity and good will to all.

Another book, published nearly two centuries later, in 2005, has contributed greatly to clarifying the importance of the Dutch in America. *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America*, by Russell Shorto in collaboration with Dr. Charles Gehring, Director of the New Netherland Institute in Albany and an expert translator of early colonial Dutch records, to create a readable and powerfully argued revisionist history that sheds new light on the Dutch role in the development not only of New York, but of the nascent United States. A *New York Times* bestseller and a featured selection of the *Book of the Month Club*, the book helped prepare the public for the important celebration of the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Henry Hudson in 2009.

As part of the goals of its founders, the Holland Dames take special pride in erecting and restoring Dutch monuments and items of historic interest around New York. On September 11, 2011, the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library reopened its doors after completing a long and costly restoration. Members of the Holland Dames were there to celebrate the restoration and rededication of the historic 13-foot-tall stained-glass window in the

Society’s library reading room. *The Arrival of the Halve Maen, 1609*, designed by the Gorham Company, was originally donated by the Holland Dames in 1909 and restored in 2011 under the leadership of then Directress General Mary Park, with major funding from the family foundation of former Directress General Anna Glen Butler Viotor. (Anna Glen Viotor was awarded the Order of the Orange-Nassau by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, an honor conferred on few foreigners.)

Before its restoration few people noticed the window. It was not even considered a part of the Society’s historic collection. David W. Dunlap of *The New York Times* wrote in his article “With a Bit of Bon Ami and Lots of Care *The Half Moon Sails Back Into View*” (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/10/with-a-bit-of-bon-ami-and-a-lot-of-care-the-half-moon-sails-back-into-view>) that the window has been brought to a luminous life after decades as an outside window exposed to the elements and covered with soot. Now safely restored and installed, the window has been formally accessioned by the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library as a significant addition to its collection. It speaks much about New York City’s early history before it was New York and even before it was New Amsterdam; in fact, while it was still wilderness.

In November 2012, under the leadership of current Directress General Elbrun Kimmelman, a second restored stained-glass window is to be reinstalled at the historic landmark St. Mark’s Church in-the-Bowery, commemorating Petrus Stuyvesant (1612-1672), the colorful and influential last Director-General of New Netherland. A champagne celebration will take place with members and friends of the Dutch, genealogical, and neighborhood communities. In 1903 the Holland Dames commissioned window designer Maitland Armstrong, a descendant of Stuyvesant, to create a memorial window bearing Stuyvesant’s image to mark his final resting place. Funding for the restoration was donated by Daughters of Holland Dames and friends from across the United States. The St. Mark’s property between Tenth and Eleventh Streets on Second Avenue is historically significant as it was part of the original farm or “bouwerie” of Petrus Stuyvesant, with the boundaries of the original farm now defined by 23rd Street to the north, Sixth Street to the south, Fourth Avenue to the west and Avenue C to the east.

Goals, Objectives and Membership Criteria of The Society Of Daughters Of Holland Dames

The window restorations fulfill the goals spelled out in the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames’ By-Laws in 1895: To perpetuate the memory of the Dutch ancestors of its members, and to establish commemorative and durable memorials in lasting tribute to the early Dutch settlers. In addition, the Society shall promote the principles and virtues of the Dutch ancestors of its members, collect



The Arrival of the Halve Maen, 1609. Stained-glass window restored and reinstalled at the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library in 2011.

and preserve genealogical and historical documents relating to the Dutch in America, and encourage excellence in historical research.

As time passes, each generation of Dutch descendants may find it more challenging to peel away the successive layers of family and city history. The Society believes that prospective members will recognize that while the retrieval of information may seem rigorous, there is a rich reward in learning more about this unique time and the important role our ancestors might have played in the earliest years of the Colony.

Eligibility for membership may be determined through any one of three avenues—or more, if desired. Any woman shall be eligible for membership who has reached the age of eighteen and is lineally descended from a person, male or female, who was born prior to the Treaty of Westminster in 1674, either in the Netherlands or in New



Newly restored stained-glass window commemorating Petrus Stuyvesant, to be reinstalled in November 2012 at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. Funding for the restoration was donated by Daughters of Holland Dames and friends from across the United States.

Netherland of Dutch parentage; OR from those whose ancestor resided in New Netherland prior to the Treaty of Westminster, 1674; OR whose ancestor was one of the following: a Director General of New Netherland, a member of the Council of the Director General of New Netherland, a member of a governmental or religious body of New Netherland, a patroon or freeholder of New Netherland, a commissioner in New Netherland either of Indian affairs, Boundaries, or Treaties, or a commissioned officer, soldier, or sailor who served in defense of New Netherland.

A prospective member of this esteemed society is required to provide proof of birth, marriage and death for each generation, going back to the immigrant ancestor, which can be ten or more generations. Fortunately for applicants, the Dutch were fastidious

about keeping vital records when they came to the New World. David M. Riker's *Genealogical and Biographical Directory to Persons in New Netherland, from 1613 to 1674*, 4 vols. (Salem, Mass.: Higginson Books, 1999), located in most large libraries in New York and available through the internet, provides genealogies on early Dutch families and is an excellent starting point. It is also published by Family Tree Maker on CD-ROM as *New Netherland Vital Records, 1600s* (1999). The Society's recently published "Researching Your Dutch Ancestors: A Practical Guide" compiled by Maria Dering, the Verifying Genealogist for the Holland Dames, is available for sale on the website: www.hollanddames.org. There are original print documents and microfilmed records existing in libraries such as the New-York Historical Society Museum and Library, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, the New York Public Library, and the Holland Society of New York, as well as in the New York State Archives in Albany, where linguists work tirelessly to translate the original documents. Important early books and documents are being digitized to provide easy access through the Internet. The Museum of the City of New York has a digitized map of the original grants of village lots from the Dutch West India Company to the inhabitants of New Amsterdam lying below the present line of Wall Street in 1642. For a fascinating view of this area, the New Amsterdam History Center Project is in the process of developing a virtual walk down Stone Street in 1660 at <http://www.newamsterdamhistorycenter.org/vnap/index.html>.

The Society of Daughters of Holland Dames Yesterday and Today

There is much vitality and camaraderie among today's Holland Dames, as most share kinship by blood and a special bond created by the knowledge that our ancestors walked the same streets almost four hundred years ago. Many of those immigrant ancestors sailed on the same ships to New Amsterdam.

Members of the Board come from around the country. Shelley Svoren, Chairman of the Registration Committee, scrutinizes member applications from her home in California and flies to board meetings and special activities on a regular basis. Other members of the Board—Kathryn Slattery, Firth Fabend, Karen Elmasry, Ellan Thorson, Mary Park, Eugenie Devine, Kathryn Longo and Leslie Swanson—arrive on various train lines feeding into New York. Following the tradition of holding meetings in their homes, established by former Directress Generals Jane Irwin, Lucy Brennan, Eugenia McCrary and Anna Glen Vietor, meetings are currently usually held in the New York homes of Elbrun Kimmelman, Lynn Manger and Polly Sheehan. Treasurer Pamela Fulweiler works in the tradition of careful bookkeeping and business, and the

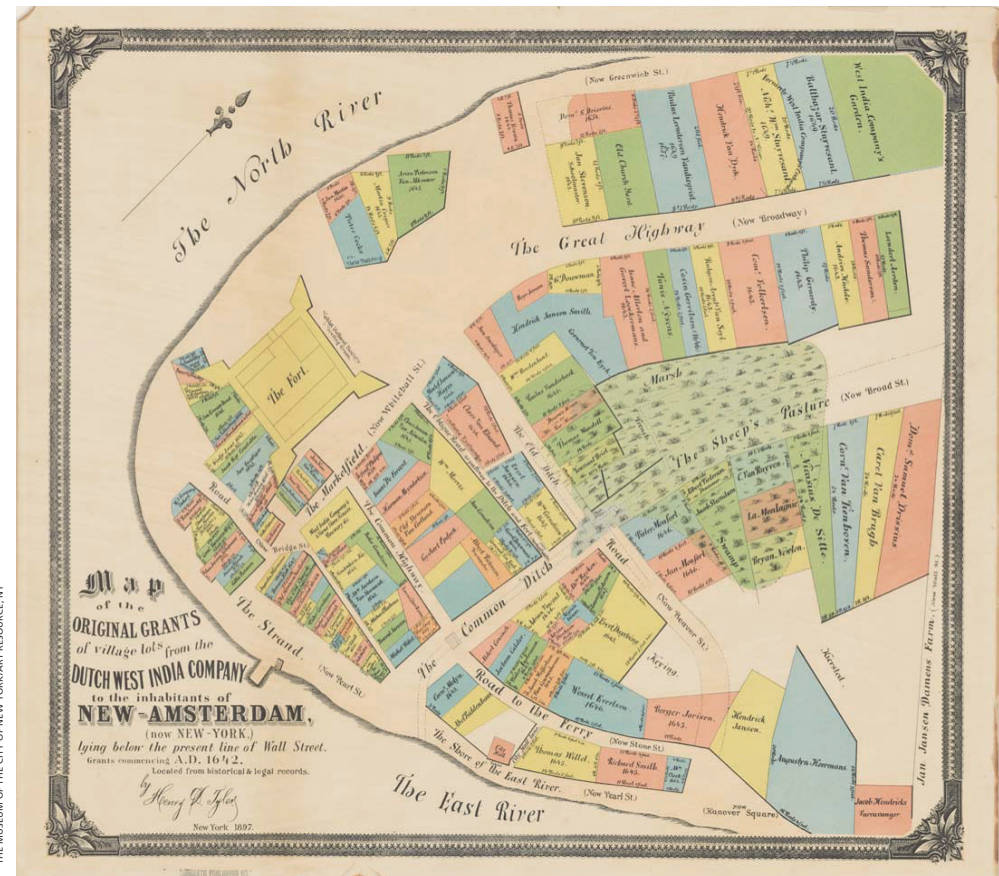
organization's funds are invested under the direction of Pamela Meyjes.

The immigrant Dutch ancestors of the Holland Dames probably could not have imagined that, a dozen or so generations after they set foot on the island, their descendants would work so diligently to help keep alive their traditions and history. This has been done through documentaries, books, lectures, and parties, such as the Annual Meeting and Tea in the spring held at the Colony Club, the Directress General's Luncheon in the fall held in the Fifth Avenue home of Directress General Elbrun Kimmelman, and the Annual Christmas Party in honor of St. Nicholas. There is the Annual Flag Day Parade in Lower Manhattan with Lisa Bird, Chairman of the Seal, Insignia and Color Guard, carrying the flag and leading a group of Dames down the original streets of New Amsterdam. Each year, Kathryn Slattery, First Directress, profiles an important member in the newsletter, edited by Past Directress General Mary Park with Firth Fabend.



Holland Dames board members meet in 2012 at the New York Genealogical & Biographical Society.

Below: Map of Original Grants, New Amsterdam (1642)





Dedication ceremony at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, September 11, 2009. (l-r) Mieke Armstrong, Polly Sheehan, Pamela Fulweiler, Adriana Vink, Regine LaVerge, Pamela Meyjes, Kitty Slattery, Felicia Stidham (†), Mary Park, Lisa Beth MacKinlay (†), Eugenia McCrary (†) Charlotte Squarcy, Marjorie Freeman.

In addition to the restoration of the stained-glass windows, special projects in recent years have included financial support for the New Netherland Project in Albany, outfitting of the replica ship *Halve Maen*, restoration of the historic Wyckoff House, digitization of original Holland Dames applications since 1895, and development of curriculum and educational materials. From 1996 to 2001, as Directress General, Anna Glen Vietor brought much vitality and made significant contributions to the Society and to the New York community through such activities as planting tulip bulbs throughout New York's public gardens, providing funding for the South Street Seaport Museum and development of a DVD, *Under Two Flags*, for use in schools throughout the state. Directress General Barbara Brinkley, who served from 2002 through 2008, brought the Society into the digital age, broadened the pool of members, originated the popular annual Directress General's Luncheon, provided creative programs to engage members, and represented the Society by participation in many community endeavors. Second Directress Dr. Firth Fabend, a noted Dutch and Huguenot historian, has written numerous books and articles about Dutch culture and tradition and has provided invaluable genealogical support and historical interpretation for the Society.


In 2009, the Daughters of Holland Dames participated in the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's discovery of the river that bears his name. This quadricentennial event was funded and organized by the state and city of New York in collaboration with local, national and international businesses and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was a wonderful celebration of New York's early Dutch history. As participants in the celebration, the Holland Dames were invited by Hugo Gajus Scheltema, the Consul General of the Netherlands, to a Garden Party on Governors Island, to celebrate and meet the wildly popular royal couple of the Netherlands, Crown Prince Willem Alexander and Princess Máxima. In anticipation of the event, Pamela Meyjes, Elbrun

Kimmelman, and Polly Sheehan worked to create a Quadricentennial Dutch Heritage Scarf, which was presented by Directress General Mary Park to Princess Máxima.

Over the years, the list of Honorary Members has included Her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina, Her Majesty Queen Juliana, Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix, and the Consuls General of the Netherlands in New York. The Holland Dames' relationship with the Dutch Royal Family goes back to the early founding of the Society and continues through contact with the Consul General of the Netherlands in New York. The Holland Dames' insignia features the blue and gold rampant lion of the Dutch Royal House with an orange ribbon, the color of the Dutch Royal Family, the House of Orange-Nassau. The State and City flags of New York still reflect the original blue and gold flag of the House of Orange-Nassau.

On September 11, 2009, the day before the Governors Island Garden Party, a dedication ceremony was organized by the Holland Dames at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery in cooperation with St. Mark's Historic Neighborhood Preservation Fund and the Dutch Province of Friesland, where Petrus Stuyvesant was born. This event drew many members of the Dutch community in New York.

The Daughters of Holland Dames archives, going back to the early 1920s, record many other parties, luncheons and dinners. Menus and seating arrangements reveal the growing and thriving society life of New York during the Gilded Age and Roaring Twenties. In 1970, at the Holland Dames' 75th anniversary luncheon at the Ballroom of the Colony Club, guests of honor on the dais included speaker Helen Hayes and presidents or governors of the St. George's Society of New York, the New York State Society of the Cincinnati, the Saint Nicholas Society, the Sons of the Revolution, the Huguenot Society of America, the Holland Society of New York, the Colonial Dames of America, the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York, the National Society of Colonial Dames in the State of New York, the Daughters of Cincinnati, and the National Society of the Descendants of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence.

For 117 years, the Society of Daughters of Holland Dames has dedicated time, resources and effort to making New York a better place by fulfilling their original objectives—and by having a good time doing it. On March 15, 2013, the Holland Dames will join the Saint Nicholas Society in the Paas Ball and presentation of debutantes as a salute to our past and future. 

For more information about the Holland Dames go to www.hollanddames.org. For queries or comments go to info@hollanddames.org.