



New Amsterdam History Center Virtual New Amsterdam 3D Model

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Appendix I, Part B: A Historical Background Summary:

“Survive and Thrive: Dutch Settlers in New Amsterdam”

Dennis J. Maika, July 2010

Developed in conjunction with the demonstration 4th-grade curriculum, produced by Diane Mallett and Mirla Morrison, under contract to American History Workshop

When teaching about daily life in Peter Stuyvesant’s time, fourth-grade students might find it interesting to consider the kinds of issues that would be immediately relevant to their age group. With this in mind, what follows are several questions that might be asked by children ages nine to ten with historically accurate answers that could be shared by the teacher.

“What would I eat?”

If you lived in New Amsterdam, you would most likely eat three meals a day, though the combination of food and drink would be different from what you’re used to. For breakfast, you would have bread with butter or cheese, a soup-like mixture of bread with vegetables called “sop,” and beer. Children and adults both drank beer because it was actually safer to drink than water that could be contaminated; in the brewing process, the water used for beer was subjected to extreme heat that would kill dangerous bacteria. You would not feel “tipsy” or drunk from this “small beer” because the alcohol content was very low (between 0.5 and 1.5% alcohol — typical American beers today are between 4-5% alcohol). If adults wanted stronger beers, they would purchase them in taverns or from brewers but typically not for breakfast!

Your afternoon meal would be the day’s main meal and would consist of two or three separate dishes: a “hutspot” (a stew with vegetables, some meat, and

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seasonings and spices if available), additional meat, poultry or fish, and finally some fruit or vegetables. And of course, there would be beer to drink. In the evening, before bed, you would again have bread with butter or cheese, some porridge, and perhaps leftovers from the day's other meals. Refrigeration wasn't available so food had to be consumed or wasted.

As you can see, bread was the essential element in the diet of those living in New Amsterdam as well as old Amsterdam in Holland. However, bread took many forms. There were loaves of bread in six- and twelve-pound sizes, rolls, and pretzels (which were sweet, dry, and hard). Also, you might enjoy a variety of pancakes (not floppy like the ones we know – these were usually stiff and eaten by hand), “poffertjes” (smaller, silver-dollar size pancakes), waffles, “kockjes” (pronounced “cookies” — this is where our English word came from), and “olie koecken” (deep-fried dough that is the forerunner of modern doughnuts).

All of your meals would be prepared using methods traditionally used in Holland. Your mother might use her own written recipes or perhaps have a Dutch cookbook from the Netherlands where you might find a instructions for making “cole slaw” (from the Dutch words for cabbage salad). From the Netherlands, New Amsterdammers also imported animals like cows and goats, as well as fruit trees and vegetables so that they could continue to eat their favorite foods. At the same time, however, you might also find many local foods from Manhattan included in your diet: native fish like striped bass or sturgeon (a large fish found in the Hudson River later known as “Albany beef”), local fowl (turkeys) and deer (a luxury in the Netherlands but plentiful here). You would also be familiar with local vegetables like maize or Indian corn, pumpkin, and beans, typically grown by the Native Americans in the region. You might even eat Native American “sapaen,” a cornmeal mush to which the Dutch often added milk.

What you ate would also depend on your family's wealth. White bread, certain spices, and sweets (especially sugar) were expensive. And if you lived on a farm outside the city wall in Manhattan, or on western Long Island (today's Brooklyn and Queens) or across the Hudson River in today's New Jersey, you might actually have fresh milk to drink.

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How would my food be cooked?

Food was cooked in a very large fireplace within the house. The hearth was the center of the Dutch home, for warmth, for light, as well as for cooking. Known as a Dutch "jambless," the hearth would measure approximately 5-6 feet high, 4-5 feet wide but would not be very deep; most fireplaces did not have sides to them but were covered by a hood that allowed smoke to rise through the chimney. There would be an iron fire back at the rear of the fireplace to help reflect the heat and protect the house walls. To provide further protection, Delft tiles (blue on white with scenes of daily life) were typically placed on either side of the fire back. Fire tongs and fire shovels would be used to move burning wood and coals to where it would be best used.

Many different cooking activities would be taking place at the same time, more than could be done on a modern stove. An iron pot could be hanging from a long pothook that had several height adjustments as well as other hooks for hanging other copper or brass kettles. A "spit" for roasting meat might be over the fire, perhaps with pans sitting below to catch the meat's juices. On the floor of the fireplace could be one or more "grapen," three-footed pots that would sit just above the burning coals. Some of the cooking would be done gradually, taking longer than other process like frying in a pan or making small pancakes (poffertjes) in a poffer pan. All of these activities required that the fire burn for a long time; families in New Amsterdam were especially happy to have long burning oak and other native hardwoods.

Generally, the cooking would be done by the woman of the house, assisted by her older children. If the family could afford it, a servant would assist with the daily cooking chores. Cooking over an open fire could be dangerous — special care was taken to prevent clothing from catching fire and special watch needed to be kept for young toddlers playing near the fire. They might be confined in a "loopwagen," or baby walker. (One survives in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.)

Would I go to school? What would my school day be like?

The Dutch believed that education was very important, essential to preparing a young person to become a responsible member of the church and community. Learning could take place in school, in the home, or on the job as an apprentice to a skilled craftsman.

There was only one school in New Amsterdam in 1660, led by a single schoolmaster. Children, both boys and girls, would attend if their parents paid for the lessons. If parents chose not to pay for instruction, they would provide for training in basic reading and writing skills at home. Learning to read would be the first priority. You might begin this process as early as three years old, and by age 6 or 7, you would have acquired basic reading skills. Writing instruction would begin next at age 8 or 9. Students needed to master use of a quill as a pen. Arithmetic would be taught next and typically cost extra. You and your fellow students would also learn the bible, the catechism of the Dutch Reformed church, and specific prayers.

School rules for behavior were often posted in the classroom. Some prohibitions would be familiar to you: hats should be removed in class, no running, screaming or swearing, no missing school without your parent's permission. You would find some rules to be very different, unique to seventeenth-century New Amsterdam: no chasing other peoples' animals, no slinging snot, fleas or lice at other students, no jumping into hay with sticks. Discipline was strict. A violation of these rules could result in physical punishment like being whacked with a paddle or whipped with a stick.

A typical school day included a morning session (from 8 to 11 A.M.) and an afternoon session (from 1 to 4 P.M.). Each session would begin and end with a prayer. You would receive additional religious instruction on Sunday afternoons after the morning church service. The school would be open all year and you might attend one nine-months' term (from September to June, or from May to November). The school might even be open at night for those who could not attend the day sessions.

If your parents didn't think formal schooling was appropriate, you could be apprenticed to work for a skilled craftsman beginning at age seven. The Dutch were not opposed to child labor — learning to work was an important preparation for the future — but they believed that instruction of various kinds must accompany work done as an apprentice. As an apprentice, you develop your basic reading and writing skills, and perhaps learn arithmetic if it was necessary for the job; your master would decide and would pay for your schooling. Of course, the most important part of your education would be to learn a specific skill of the craft. Parents with money could pay a fee to an apprentice to teach their child a trade but those families who could not afford these fees would often bind their children to work for a master for a certain number of years. Included in these apprenticeship contracts would be your

length of service (anywhere from one to ten years, four years being typical), any form of payment you would receive, the type of work that was expected of you, specifics on your training and education (if necessary for the occupation), and your allowances for food and clothing. This was typically a formal contract, signed by your parents and your master in the presence of a court official (a notary public). Your parents would be held accountable to the master if you did not honor the contract's terms. But if a boy's father was a skilled craftsman, chances are that he would learn the family trade. Girls were not given the same opportunities to develop a trade and generally were trained in more domestic skills like cleaning, laundering, and cooking.

In sum, if you were a child in New Amsterdam between the ages eight and nine, you might attend school to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, while your friends might be working for a master craftsman, learning a trade.

What would I do for fun?

Even though you were expected to work very early in your life, you also had many opportunities to play. Many children's games were played outdoors. You would be familiar with some of these games: leap frog, jumping rope, or ice-skating. You might recognize various ball games but "bladder ball" would be unique, given that the game's principal piece of equipment was an actual animal bladder that was inflated. Other games played in seventeenth-century New Amsterdam might be unfamiliar to you: "trundling hoops" (rolling a wooden hoop with a stick trying to keep in upright), playing skittle ball (a game similar to bowling, using nine pins), and even "kolf" (a game using heavy, curved clubs to drive a ball to a goal post, typically played on ice, more for adults). Other games could be played inside or outside the house. You could play cards (though parents were concerned that card-playing not be gambling), blow soap bubbles, shoot marbles, or spin wooden tops. Young girls would play with dolls and related accessories; boys would play with drums and hobbyhorses.

Children also used several musical instruments for their amusement. The most popular was the mouth harp (also known as a "jaw's harp" or "Jews harp"). Made of iron or brass, these were placed in the mouth and used to produce distinct sounds and melodies. You might also use clay whistles and homemade flutes and recorders.

What would I wear?

Since most textiles were imported from the Netherlands, clothes were expensive and valuable. Most often, you would wear clothes that were used by your older brothers or sisters. Boys wore coats, breeches (short pants), "mantles" (a short jacket or covering), and hats and caps. Girls would wear skirts, coats, bodices, and a tight-fitting vest. Both boys and girls would wear underwear made of linen. For all, outerwear would be made of wool and leather and would rarely be washed; linen underwear, however, would be washed regularly.

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