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## NEW AMSTERDAM YESTERDAY AND TODAY

New Amsterdam History Center Newsletter – Vol. III, no. 2

Fall 2020

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### Letter from the President

Dear Patrons and Fellow New Amsterdam Enthusiasts,

Firstly, I trust that you are safe and that your health and well-being are your highest priority. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic we were not able to provide you with the live event on May 5<sup>th</sup> that we had planned for you, *Fighting the Flood*, but please watch your inboxes for the announcement of this event, which will now take place online in December. In the meantime, I hope that you were able to enjoy our Spring newsletter, the launch of *Mapping Early New York*, and recordings of previous events from our archive.

To allow all of us to remain in good health, while continuously learning about our history, we will offer you some online events this Fall. They are going to be spectacular! I hope you will be able to join us online on October 6, when three eminent historians and authors, Russell Shorto, Barry Lewis, and as moderator, Robert Snyder, will share thoughts about the “Dutchness” of New York in *New York Is A Dutch City*, and again in December, when we will be enlightened on New York’s history and future, while dealing with the dangers and opportunities that come with the plentiful

water surrounding our urban archipelago in *Fighting the Flood*. Articles about both events containing the details follow below.

A warm thank you to our patrons, whose support enables us to keep offering you interesting talks, newsletters, lesson plans, and a mapped database! If you are not supporting us yet, please consider doing so. Information about becoming a Patron of the New Amsterdam History Center can be found below. Thanks in advance.

Friendly regards to all; I hope you will join us for our October 6 event, *New York Is a Dutch City*, and again in December for *Fighting the Flood*.

Tom Visée  
NAHC President

PS: Are you getting bored at home? We have video recordings of many of our past events available for you to watch for free! Have a look at

[www.newamsterdamhistorycenter.org/past](http://www.newamsterdamhistorycenter.org/past)

## New York Is a Dutch City

## Fighting the Flood

NAHC IS ZOOMING! JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT TWO PROGRAMS!

Ina Lee Selden, NAHC Program Committee

This fall and winter, NAHC is taking our programs online, from a hotel meeting room to the wider world. We will welcome participants from throughout the U.S., the U.K, the European Union, Australia, and Indonesia. Locally we are pleased to formally welcome the Guides Association of New York City (GANYC) as strategic partners to tell the story of New York City from its inception as a Dutch trading post to its position as one of the world's greatest metropolises.

### *NEW YORK IS A DUTCH CITY*

On October 6, two lions of New York City history, Russell Shorto and Barry Lewis, will come together in conversation for the first time for "New York Is a Dutch City." We're expecting a lively, thought-provoking discussion of the lasting legacy of the Dutch presence here. Among the topics: our democratic institutions, rule of law, hyphenated

Studies and Journalism at Rutgers University-Newark. In October 2019, he was named Manhattan Borough Historian, making him the island's foremost ambassador to both residents and visitors.

### *FIGHTING THE FLOOD*

On December 1, NAHC brings together representatives from four Dutch engineering and landscaping companies busy here in New York doing what the Dutch do best, planning ahead.

While our attention is concentrated on the opening of schools and the development of a vaccine for Covid 19, weather and wind respect no human schedule. And, as recent extreme weather events have shown, New York City remains acutely vulnerable to flooding. Therefore, addressing the potential danger is more urgent than ever.

On December 1, a panel of three dynamic experts working in New York for Dutch engineering or landscaping

nationality, entrepreneurial spirit, multiculturalism, and vocabulary.

Shorto is the author of the groundbreaking, best-selling *Island at the Center of the World*, and *Revolution Song*, the story of six very different individuals who sang or heard the song of freedom in the buildup to the American Revolution. Shorto is a senior scholar at the New Netherland Institute in Albany and a frequent contributor to the *New York Times Magazine*.

Lewis recently retired as lecturer at The Cooper Union. He was also a frequent speaker at the New-York Historical Society, where his talks sold out before the ink dried on the announcements. At Cooper Union his “The City Transformed” taught students how to “read” New York through its architectural evolution. His Public Television walking tours through NYC neighborhoods remain a veritable time capsule of Manhattan at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our lion tamer, AKA moderator, will be Robert Snyder, author of the recent *All the Nations Under Heaven: Immigrants, Migrants and the Making of New York*. Until this year Dr. Snyder taught American

companies will offer their forward-thinking strategies for preventing future flooding in New York. Matthijs Bouw, award-winning Dutch architect, urbanist, and founder of One Architecture, will lead the discussion among Edgar Westerhof, Daniel Vasini, and Pippa Brashear.

--Edgar Westerhof, of Arcadis, has an extensive flood-protection track record in New York City that includes resilience planning and design works for East Side Coastal Resilience and the Lower Manhattan & Financial District Master Plan.

--Daniel Vasini, of West 8. The firm’s projects include monumental coastal-resilience strategies on Governors Island and an intimate green oasis created at The Park at Essex Crossing on Manhattan’s Lower East side.

--Pippa Brashear, of SCAPE, a leading expert on resilience planning and climate adaptation, works with large, multi-disciplinary teams to develop landscape strategies and next-century infrastructure that integrate environmental, economic, and social benefit.

Please scroll down to register for *New York Is a Dutch City*.



Wijnie de Groot

## DUTCH AT COLUMBIA AND OTHER U.S. UNIVERSITIES

Wijnie de Groot, Director of the Columbia University Dutch Language Program

In any other year, the month of June would have seen around 20 students gather at

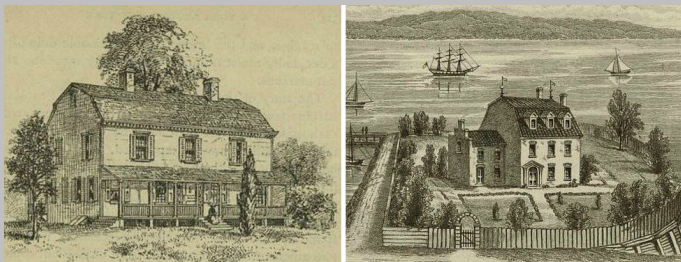
Columbia University for the annual Dutch Language Summer Course. They are mainly graduate students (working toward the Ph.D., but also the occasional master's student, and even faculty members) from universities all over the U.S. and Canada, and occasionally from Europe. They include students of history, art history, religion, and musicology who need to acquire a reading knowledge of Dutch to help them in their research. Many of them focus on the early modern period, so an ability to read 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century handwritten texts is crucial. The program, which is wholly funded by the Dutch Language Union in the Hague, has been taking place since 2008, but this year it was cancelled because of the Pandemic.

The Dutch Language Program at Columbia is part of the Department of Germanic Languages and offers courses on the elementary through advanced levels. Students typically take Dutch to fulfill their foreign-language requirement, but they also choose Dutch for many different reasons: they have been to Flanders or the Netherlands and now want to know more about the language; they may have family there and hope to communicate with them in their own language; or they just like to take a “smaller” language than the main ones that students typically take, such as Spanish, Chinese, or Russian.

The courses are also open to NYU students who take Dutch at Columbia through a collaborative agreement between both universities. Dutch is even available to students from Yale and Cornell, through the Shared Course Initiative (SCI), which is an inter-institutional collaboration between Columbia, Cornell, and Yale for sharing the less commonly taught languages via real-time high-definition videoconferencing. Students from those institutions are part of the class through large screens and interact with the Columbia students in real time. Dutch has been part of the SCI since its start in 2012 and has seen its program grow over the years. Many of the participating students from Yale and Cornell are graduate students who are pleased to be able to take part in Dutch courses, as the Dutch programs at Yale and Cornell unfortunately were eliminated over ten years ago.

Where else can American students learn Dutch? For a language with, according to the Dutch Language Union, almost 24 million native speakers, at surprisingly few universities. (Scandinavian languages, although spoken by many fewer people, have a stronger presence at U.S. universities.) Those universities where Dutch is taught can be found in the traditional immigration states (the University of Wisconsin, of Michigan, and of Minnesota, Calvin University (formerly Calvin College), and Indiana University), as well as UC Berkeley, UPenn, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It is to be hoped that in this time of budget cuts at universities, Dutch will survive and flourish and remain the important language it is for undergrads and graduate students alike.

Stuyvesant's Bouwerie House (L) and Whitehall (R)



## PETRUS STUYVESANT, A NOTE ON HIS BOUWERIE

Firth Fabend, Program Committee

Russell Shorto and Len Tantillo recently published an interesting article titled “In Search of Stuyvesant’s Bowery.”<sup>1</sup> By superimposing the famous 1767 map of the city by Bernard Ratzer onto the Google Maps street plan, they correctly identified the location of the *bouwerie* or farm where Ratzer had placed it, on today’s First Avenue and Avenue A, between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> streets.

Stuyvesant had purchased his *bouwerie*, originally of 300 acres, from the Dutch West India Company in 1648, a year after his arrival in New Amsterdam. Over the following sixteen years of his governorship he purchased surrounding lots and took over abandoned ones, until the property eventually became one of 550 acres stretching from present Fifth Street to Twenty-third Street and from the Bowery Lane, or Fourth Avenue, to the East River.

Parts of this land were swampy and parts were sandy; the latter were even known as the “Sand Hills” of the neighborhood, a major natural geological phenomenon estimated to be 100 feet in elevation. Stuyvesant allocated many of his personal resources to making this property arable, testifying that he had done so by “fencing, damming, and raising up some abandoned lots at great cost and labour, out of the water and swamp, with about eight or nine thousand [wagon] loads of sand.”<sup>2</sup> On a very detailed British Headquarters Map made during the American Revolution, what were left of the Sand Hills of the lower East Side still stand out, a hundred and more years after Stuyvesant was gone.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the Sand Hills were huge, and Petrus Stuyvesant wanted them away. Perhaps remembering how in 1650 he had dismantled and moved Fort Nassau down the Delaware River from today’s Gloucester, NJ, to today’s New Castle, DE, a distance of 32 miles, he proceeded to distribute the obtrusive hills, via wagons, around his swampy property. As I have written elsewhere, “such came naturally to the phenomenon known as Petrus Stuyvesant, doer and fixer, builder of colonies, creator of public order, now mover of Mother Earth.”<sup>4</sup>

1. In *New Netherland Matters* (Albany: New Netherland Institute, Spring 2020), pp. 5-9.
2. Berthold Fernow, ed., *The Records of New Amsterdam from 1653 to 1674* 7 vols., vol. 2:329-30.
3. “British Headquarters Map of Manhattan,” c.1782-1783, National Archives, Kew, Borough of Richmond.
4. Firth Haring Fabend, *New Netherland in a Nutshell: A Concise History of the Dutch Colony in North America* (Albany: New Netherland Institute, 2012), pp. 96-97.

**What the Dutch Painter of Domestic Life Pieter de Hooch Can Teach Us About How to Embrace the Simple Joys of Staying Home**

**The Dutch artist who inspired Vermeer has a lot to teach Americans living in lockdown today.**

Allen Hirsch, May 22, 2020



Pieter de Hooch, *A Woman Seated by a Window with a Child in the Doorway*(c.1663).

Week five of the shutdown. The initial dread and diversion has faded. The existential doubt rises up and we wonder about our basic survival—much as the first settlers of New Amsterdam did long ago when they first arrived here to start a trading outpost. The island of Manna-hatta has become a wild and empty place again and I feel the Dutch spirit rising up from beneath the asphalt.

We Manhattanites are not known to be a domestic breed. We live in a city filled with commercial, cultural, recreational opportunities on every street corner and these have always been an extension of our habitat. Many of us live in small apartments while we surf the island; the streets are our hallways, the museums our living rooms, the restaurants our kitchens, and the parks and rivers our backyards.

Now, in the age of self-isolation, we find ourselves looking at our four walls as the new boundaries of our universe. When we venture outside, the streets are shuttered and we pass the sparse masked figures at a distance. Everything that was the vitality and freedom of New York has been closed.

The last great Gotham shutdown was the blackout during Hurricane Sandy. Those of us that remained downtown huddled around candlelight with strangers and imagined we were transported back to a simpler time without electricity or internet. Now we are confined mostly to our homes but have all the trappings of domesticity: hot water, toasters, Facebook—there are no primordial distractions. Many of us cannot worry about money because no one is paying us and we will not be paying anyone for the time being. What do we do? We are stuck in a habitat that we now realize was just a backdrop, a *pied a terre* in the vast wonderland of Gotham. Now we cook, wash, and sweep our floors like the tiger that paces the same circle in his cage with bloody paws.

I look to a painting on my wall by the 17th-century Dutch painter, Pieter de Hooch. It is a domestic scene of a mother calmly peeling turnips in a corner while a child enters the threshold carrying a flask and a plate, smiling down at a little dog looking up in anticipation. I am relieved.

I recently returned from the artist's first exhibit ever in the Netherlands, which closed last month at the Museum Prisenhof in Delft, steps away from his residence on the Oude Delft. Depicting how we fit into our rectangular dwellings was a lifelong fascination of De Hooch who was born in Rotterdam in 1629, moved to Delft by 1652 and then relocated to the more prosperous Amsterdam sometime after 1660.

New Amsterdam lasted from 1626 until 1664, when four English frigates sailed into the harbor demanding surrender. They later exchanged the island of Surinam and the island of Run in the West Indies to the Dutch as part of the Treaty of Breda. New Amsterdam then had a population of 2,500 and practiced the kind of free trade and multiculturalism that characterizes much of what is New York today. According to Russell Shorto, author of *Island at the Center of the World*, the Dutch influence on America has often been overlooked due to the English's subsequent conquest and their own rewriting of history.\*

While the Dutch were fur trading and building homes in Manhattan below Wall Street in the 17th century, on the other side of the Atlantic, Pieter de Hooch was busy in Delft painting his famous Dutch interiors that so inspired Vermeer, who lived a few blocks away. Both artists focused on harmonizing the geometry of the walls and fixtures within the home with the organic form and movement of the

human figure living within. While Vermeer's work was more studied and focused on the single figure entranced in her tasks, De Hooch's interiors were freer and filled with the air of human relationships. These kinds of pictures were in demand in 17th-century Holland, where a new merchant class was established with dispensable income from foreign trading or local production. People worked hard and when they returned home, they wanted a reminder of the true fruits of their labor: their home life.

The juxtaposition of geometry and human figure in European art before the Dutch Golden Age was confined to religious subject matter: whether twisted bodies on crosses, apostles among Greek architecture, or groups of small figures set in grand churches and cathedrals, this geometry was idealistic and often at odds with the human figure. But now, a kinder, gentler geometry was brought into the Dutch home: the sacred was now the domestic. This was the dawn of genre painting.

I look back at the picture; the gently forward movement of the child and the calm receptive seated matriarch gives the daily scene an air of the Annunciation. Light flows through the beveled glass window and dances upon the wall over the woman's head. It bounces off open doors and shutters, showing its simple but mesmerizing journey from its outside source to our eyes. The tiled floor lifts upwards to create a holographic dimension to the entire room while simultaneously flattening into diamond shapes. A shaft of light is seen mysteriously thru the crevice in a farther room.

De Hooch's fascination with architectural elements like bricks and tiles probably took a cue from his father, who was a bricklayer. His mother was a midwife but passed away while he was young and Pieter himself lost two of his seven children, likely to the bubonic plague, which killed a tenth of Amsterdam's population in the 1660s. While traces of these losses may be read into some of his room's empty chairs, De Hooch's most well-known pictures are optimistic and unsurpassed as homages to the beauty, tenderness, and dignity between mother and child in the home.

Movement and stillness, light and shadow, figure and rectangle are reconciled by the ineffable... quietude, to coin a phrase by the late Dutch curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walter Liedtke. "What one most admires in De Hooch are qualities that seem intangible, intuitive, even inarticulate.... the interior itself seems to promise comfort and protection, while the light stroking (as if feeling) different surfaces suggests pleasure in the beauty of ordinary things."

Now, with our inability to work, go out, and distract ourselves with the business of the world, it is a good time to pierce through the centuries and look at the walls around us, at the things De Hooch painted; a child in the doorway, the shaft of afternoon sunlight, a pitcher of water. His pictures force us to slow down and savor the simple joys of our lives in our homes as the Dutch did long ago—even beneath our feet. What else have we been striving for?

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*Allen Hirsch is a painter, writer, and entrepreneur who lives in Soho. The New York Times produced an Op-doc, Long Live Benjamin, on the artist and his monkey, which won an Emmy in 2018. Follow artnet News on Facebook:*

## NAHC EVENTS AND MILESTONES

### Upcoming Events

Please check your inboxes for future information.

Online  
October 6, 2020,

Two well-known writers and historians, Barry Lewis and Russell Shorto will talk about the continued influence of the Dutch presence in New York. Registration by October 2, 2020 is required.

<http://newamsterdamhistorycenter.org/events/current>

***FIGHTING THE FLOOD***

Online  
December 1, 2020

Dutch Approaches to New York's Climate Change Challenges

A panel discussion featuring a moderator and three representatives from major Dutch companies who are currently working to help New York City deal with rising oceans and rivers resulting from climate change is planned for early December, 2020. (Postponed from May 5.) The panelists will speak about innovative, multi-functional solutions that foster cooperation and local involvement, hallmarks of how the Dutch build the vast systems of polders and pumps that keep the Netherlands from sinking into the sea, and what can be done in our archipelago to affect the same. Please watch your in-boxes for further information.



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NAHC relies on volunteer help and contributions for its existence. Only by partnering with history enthusiasts like you we can continue to preserve, share, and enrich public understanding of this singular American story.

Your contribution to the NAHC large or small continues to help us:

- Maximize our story-telling capacities



- Further develop our website as an information-rich and dynamic educational portal
  - Organize events and substantive public programs
- Further develop a virtual experience that reveals the multifaceted history of New Amsterdam
- Help us achieve our ultimate goal – creation of a physical center of exploration and learning about New Amsterdam.

Please consider using the AmazonSmile NAHC link to make your next purchases and help support our upcoming programs and beyond! Please remember, the pennies add up.

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