

Fort Good Hope

A DEPICTION OF THE
DUTCH FORT
ON THE BANKS OF
THE CONNECTICUT RIVER
IN 17TH CENTURY HARTFORD

BY

HISTORICAL ARTIST

L. F. TANTILLO

A PROJECT OF THE CONNECTICUT RIVER MUSEUM

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

No one living today knows what Fort Good Hope, on the banks of the Connecticut River in Hartford, looked like. Some information can be gleaned from historical accounts but it is quite vague and of little use in definitively representing the physical appearance of the fortification. So where to begin??

The Journal of David de Vries

David Pietersz de Vries was a renowned 17th century Dutch explorer noted for his many global expeditions and dogged documentation of those adventures in his extensive journals. In the late 1630s de Vries made several visits to the North American Dutch colony of New Netherland, a tract of land stretching from Connecticut, through New York and New Jersey and southward into Delaware. In 1639 de Vries spent 6 days at Fort Good Hope on the Connecticut River in what is now the city of Hartford.

On June 4, 1639 de Vries wrote, "...the West India Company have a small fort called the House of Hope." On



David Pietersz de Vries

June 7th he states, "They cannot sail with large ships into this river, and vessels must not draw more than six feet water to navigate up to our little fort, which lies fifteen miles from the mouth of the river." On June 9th he arrived with a yacht at the House of Hope where he noted the presence of 14 or 15 soldiers. He added, "This redoubt stands upon

a plain on the margin of the river, and alongside it runs a creek to a high woodland, out of which comes a valley, which makes this kill, and where the English, in spite of us, have begun to build up a small town, and had built a fine church, and over a hundred houses."

Aside from a lengthy description on June 12th of his encounter with the English where he again refers to the Dutch installation as a "little fort or redoubt" there are no clues given as to the appearance of Fort Good Hope. It is interesting to note that of the 6 days de Vries spent there we only have 3 accounted for in his journal including a brief mention of his departure on the 14th.

Charles McKew Parr

In 1969 Thomas Y. Crowell Company published a book by Charles McKew Parr entitled, *The Voyages of David De Vries: Navigator and Adventurer whose writings reveal why the Dutch lost America to the English*. For those looking for a detailed description of Fort Good Hope there is none more complete and informative than that provided in Parr's book. For serious scholars and historians, however, there is one inherent flaw, no footnotes. Without knowing the sources of his descriptive writing, it is impossible to verify its credibility.

It is so tantalizingly tempting to use this material since so much vivid detail is given. Parr writes:

"David's arrival took the fort by surprise, and consequently the conventional salute by cannon was omitted. On stepping upon the pier, he was challenged by a sentry, and he was then held at the gate until he could be greeted by the surprised commanding officer. Gijsbert van Dijck tried to make amends for his lack of welcome and conducted him into the great hall for a formal toast with a Venetian glass of West Indian rum.

After David had presented his letter of introduction from Kieft, the commander took him on a tour of the premises. David noted that alongside the redoubt ran a creek, forming a kill called the Little River, which supplied a suitable harbor in front of the entrance. He did not describe the fortress minutely although it is presumed to have been built of huge horizontally laid logs, with corners of imported yellow Dutch brick. On each side of the gate were two demiculverins mounted on a high platform to sweep the Connecticut River.

Inside the compound was a spring-fed well and a wattled pasture for hogs, cattle, poultry, oxen, and draft horses, and a shed for farm tools. The blockhouse, a two-story building about twenty-six feet long, stood in the center of the enclosure. The interior is believed to have been separated into chambers by a huge central chimney and hearthstone, as in some structures of the period still surviving. On the second floor, with access by ladder, were sleeping quarters. There was a cool deep cellar walled by the stone foundation of the blockhouse.

David wrote, 'Outside the stockade is the farm, containing a kitchen garden planted with beans, pumpkins, and other

vegetables, a large field of maize, and a good-sized orchard of apples, cherries, pears, and peaches. There is no chapel, but there is a burying ground with grave markers of sandstone.

Behind the farm is a gate to a road leading up the hill into the deep forest. Our Dutch land is on each side of the Little River, and also upon a small island protruding into the Connecticut River."

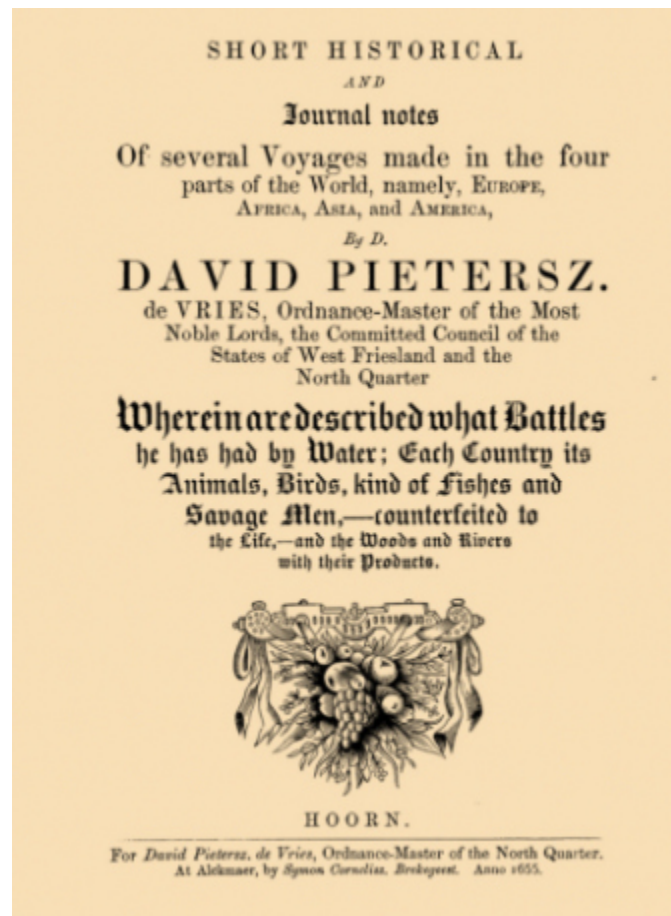
It's worth noting that Parr's work was well respected. Willem J. van Balen, a member of the Board of the Linschoten Society and author of fifty works on exploration now on the shelves of the Royal Library at the Hague, wrote: "I can hardly imagine any American author better qualified than McKew Parr for staging this remarkable 17th century Dutch skipper, a notable live wire who acted in turns as trader, diplomat and fighter at the time when plucky little Holland ruled many waves, including those of the Hudson River."

Perhaps one day Parr's descriptions of Fort Good Hope will be validated by the discovery of his source material. Until then only fragmented pieces of the puzzle will remain as the only verifiable clues to its physical appearance.

Bits and Pieces

Another brief reference describing Fort Good Hope's appearance and armament can be found in an excerpt from the writings of Governor William Bradford circa 1635. In his manuscript he explains how the Dutch having built a "slight" fort with two cannons tried to prevent the English from passing to trade with the Indians. Apparently, the English ignored the threat of being fired upon and sailed past the guns in a "great new bark" with building materials for a new house.

Additionally, Lambrechtsen's *History of New Netherland* states: "He too [Director General van Twiller] constructed at a very early period a blockhouse in its defense [the Connecticut River], named Fort Good Hope." Mention of a blockhouse appears in other accounts of the fort as well. There are, however, no descriptions of the materials used to construct the blockhouse or any of the supporting structures that would have been needed for the maintenance of a working farm on the site. The abundance of available lumber suggests that roughhewn timber would have been the construction material of choice.



LOCATING THE SITE OF THE FORT

To understand 17th century Hartford a clear idea of its geography at that time is essential. Three hundred and eighty plus years of development profoundly changed the terrain of the city's waterfront. The very features that attracted the Dutch to settle there are long gone. The most notable and profound change was the relocation underground of the Little River. It was that serpentine waterway at its junction with the Connecticut River that formed the peninsular landform called out on period maps as "Dutch Point."

Historians of the early 20th century placed the site of the Dutch fort on the south side of the Little River, inland of the main channel. Their reasoning may have been based on a literal interpretation of the circa 1655 Novi Belgii map which encompassed an area from Canada to Virginia. Depicted on that document, at a tiny scale, is a four-bastion fort at "Hartfort" south of a tributary of the Connecticut River which was probably taken to represent the Little River. There are several problems with that

assessment, the first being that identical four-bastion fort icons are used to represent every fort on that map. Fort Good Hope, likely had no bastions and the land on the south side of the Little River rose sharply to a prominent ridge. Building a fort below such a feature would make the site extremely vulnerable to attack from the high ground. Additionally, there are numerous accounts that place Fort Good Hope on Dutch Point.

An example of that notation can be found on page 260 of *Scaeva's Hartford in the Olden Time*, 1853, edited by W. M. B. Hartly, which states:

"Captain John Underhill then resided upon Long Island. He was a bold, active, military man. The seizure of hostile property, under law and custom, redounded to the

New Map of Hartford, Connecticut. From the Latest Surveys. Published by Belknap & Warfield, 1898.



Detail from a 1902 copy of a map of the City of Hartford surveyed and drawn by Marcus Smith, 1850, which clearly calls out the location of Dutch Point.

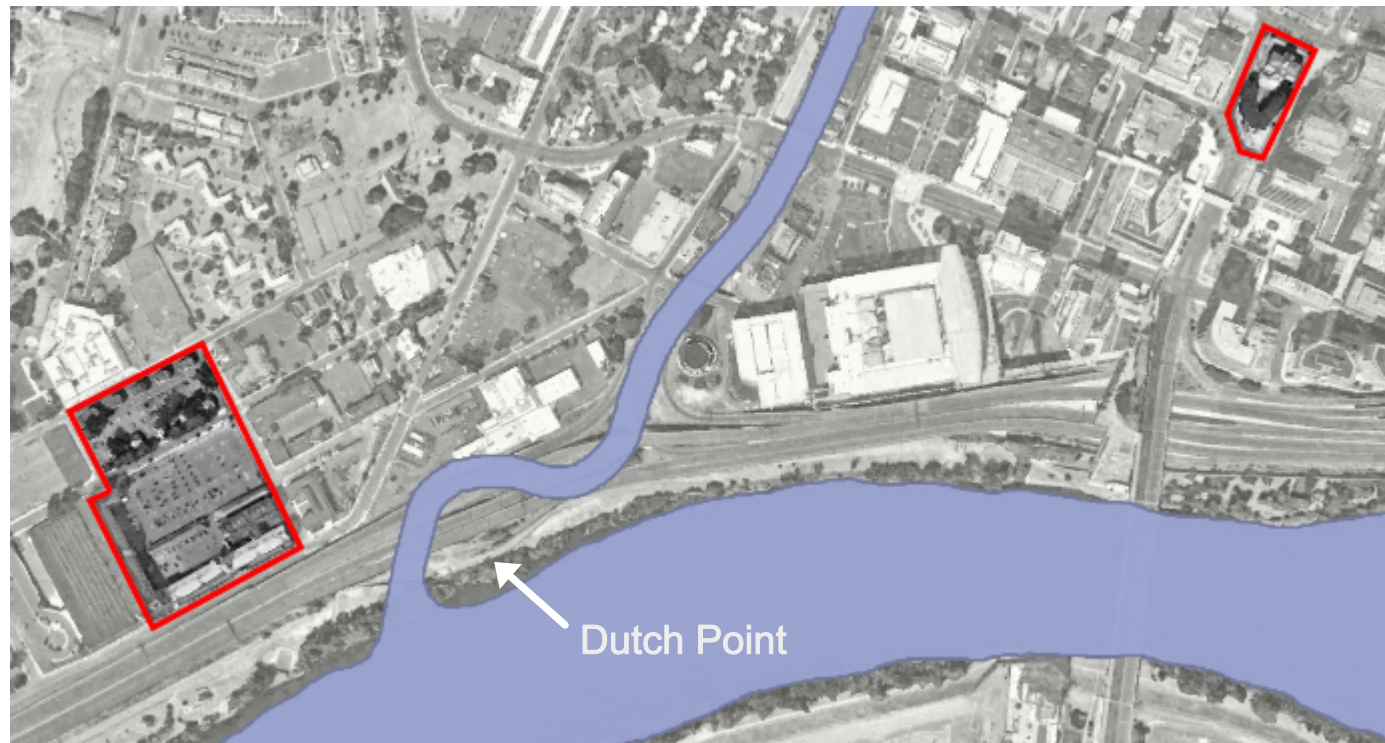


Detail from the New Map of Hartford, 1898, (left) showing the accurate locations of Dutch Point and city streets, many of which still exist in the present day city.

pecuniary benefit of the chief agent in making it. Moved partly by this consideration, partly also by the fact that he alone, perhaps, at this time, possessed a formal commission to act in the case, and moved also partly by the solicitation of friends in Hartford, he came to this Town in June, 1653, and in this month and year, accompanied by William Whiting and John Ingersoll as witnesses, went down to Dutch Point, and on the door of the House of Hope, fastened the following ominous Notice: 'I John Underhill do seize this house and land for the State of England, by virtue of commission granted by Providence Plantations!'"

The Scaeva's chapter on the location of Dutch Point continues for several pages with additional information linking Fort Good Hope to that location.

Assuming that Fort Good Hope was built on Dutch Point, the next step was to locate the site in present day Hartford. There are very accurately surveyed maps of the city from the 19th century clearly showing Dutch Point, the Little River, and street locations that have remained unchanged. By simply overlaying the earlier data onto current maps and Google's satellite imagery those features were easily and precisely established.



Google satellite image of downtown Hartford with an overlay based on the surveyed maps of the late 19th century, locating the junction of the Little River and the Connecticut River. Note that the areas outlined in red served as reference points in coordinating map details.



Google satellite image of present-day Hartford, CT

The Claude L. Yates map of 1928 depicts a conjectural plan of the city of Hartford in the year 1640. The assumptions made regarding the Dutch fort seem to be substantially incorrect. It is highly unlikely that a four-bastion, conventional European style fort ever existed in Hartford. Also locating a fort so far from the main channel of the Connecticut River would serve no functional defensive purpose.



Digital terrain model of the Little and Connecticut Rivers with artist's assumptions regarding the placement of Fort Good Hope, cultivated farmlands, dockage, and fortification features. (no scale)





THE BLOCKHOUSE

Fort Good Hope was built by Jacob van Curler under orders from Director General of New Netherland, Wouter van Twiller, in 1633 on Dutch Point at the junction of the Little and Connecticut Rivers in, what is today, Hartford, Connecticut. Charles McKew Parr describes the main structure inside the walls of a palisade as a 26-foot blockhouse, two stories in height, with a central chimney. A "blockhouse" reference is also made on page 92 of *A History of New Netherlands*, by N. C. Lambrechtsen, 1841, which states:

"The Governor [Director] General van Twiller made that purchase from the Pequots, who conquered it from other tribes. He too constructed at a very early period a blockhouse in its defense, named Fort Good Hope."

The fort was defended by 14 or 15 soldiers and the placement of two elevated cannons. Parr states that the ordnance was positioned to sweep the main channel of the Connecticut River. William Bradford, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, wrote:

"But the Dutch begin now to repent, and hearing of our purpose and preparation, endeavor to prevent us, get in a little before us, make a slight fort, and plant two pieces of ordnance, threatening to stop our passage."

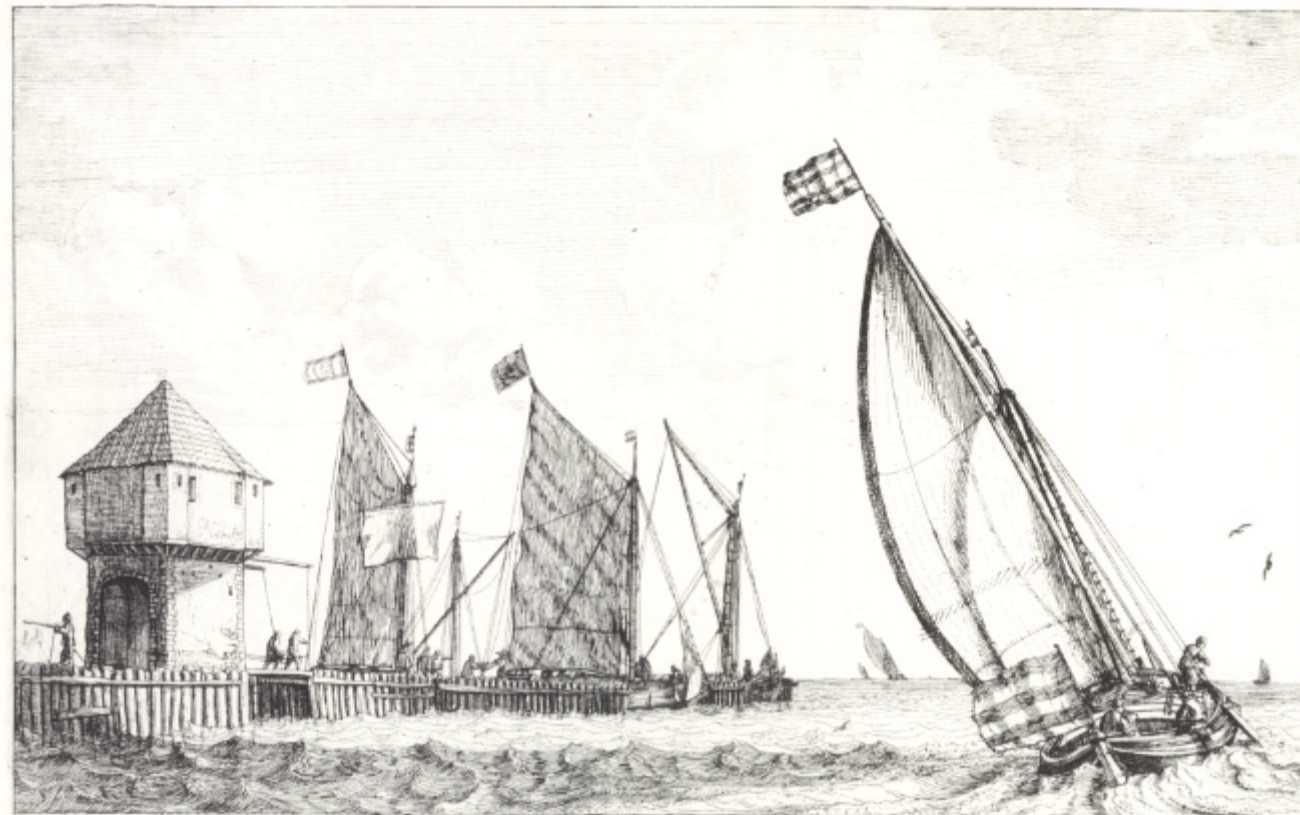


Dutch "Blokhuys." 1637 Ambon Island, Indonesia

The redout van Willemstadt, built c.1583. In this drawing the redout is described as a small fortification.



17th century Dutch blockhouse, circa 1640, Knuisdijkschans, Zeeland, excavated by Hans van Westing, Image courtesy of Hans van Westing



Redout van Willemstadt. B. Peters fecit.



Blockhouse sketch by L. F. Tantillo based on the Knuisdijkschans blockhouse and other period structures of that type.

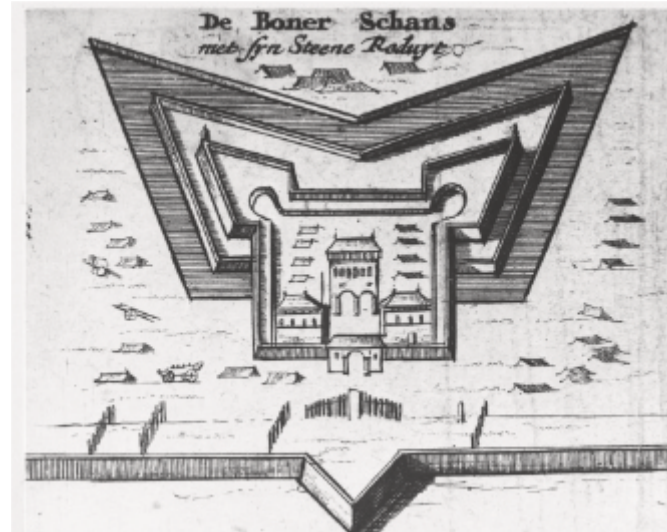
FORT GOOD HOPE

The feature affecting the appearance of Fort Good Hope most significantly would have been the arrangement and positioning of the cannons. 17th century forts commonly were designed with multiple bastions. Fort Orange on the Hudson River at Albany, Fort Casimir on the Delaware River at New Castle, and Fort Amsterdam in Manhattan all possessed four, earth-filled bastions at their respective corners providing elevated platforms for their ordnance. We know this because they were shown that way on period maps. Sometimes, many years later, cartographers still made note of surviving ruins. For instance, an English map of Albany made in the 1750s, long after the Dutch era on the Hudson River, identified the location of Fort Orange by indicating the mounds of earth that had once formed its bastions. It's unfortunate that no map has been found of Dutch Point that depicts any construction or subsequent ruin that would have existed there in either the 17th or 18th century.

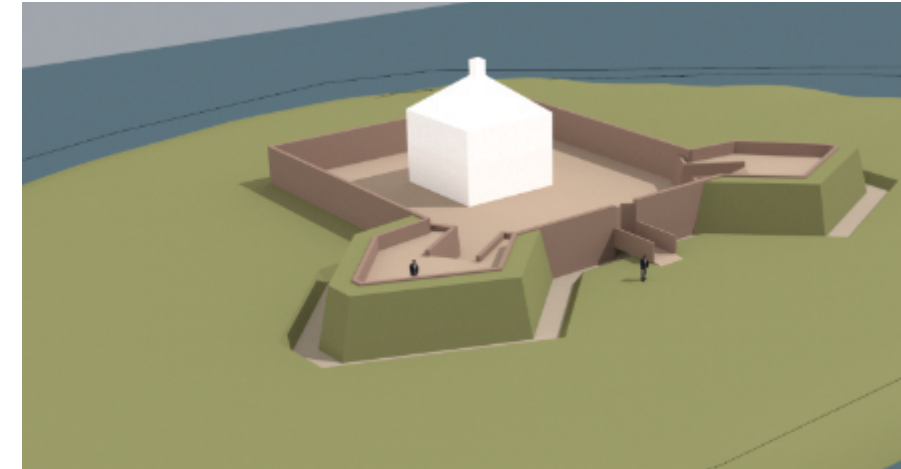
Dutch designs for two-bastion forts place those structures on opposite or adjacent corners depending on their defensive purpose. If a two-bastion setup were used at Fort Good Hope, and the defense of the Connecticut River was the primary goal, then adjacent placement would be the most logical choice. Since the Hartford fort is so often described as "little," "small," and "slight," It's likely that the more elaborate construction of corner bastions would have been dismissed in favor of something like a single ravelin for the two cannons. A triangular earthen outwork placed with its apex facing the channel could effectively provide a defense of the river from both inbound and outbound hostile forces.

There's no way of knowing how the perimeter curtain wall surrounding the blockhouse was built. It could have been

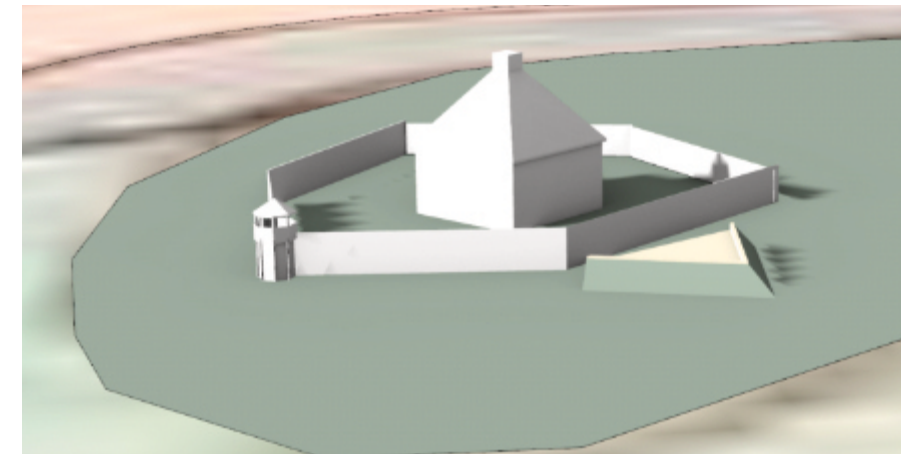
made with poles of equal length placed vertically, side by side in typical stockade fashion. Horizontally stacked roughhewn timber laid up "log cabin" style is also a possibility. The latter arrangement is a bit more economical in that it allowed for the use of random lengths of wood. The overall configuration of the palisade wall may have been square or multi-sided. The shape chosen would have been determined by the form and the usage of the land on which the fort was being built.



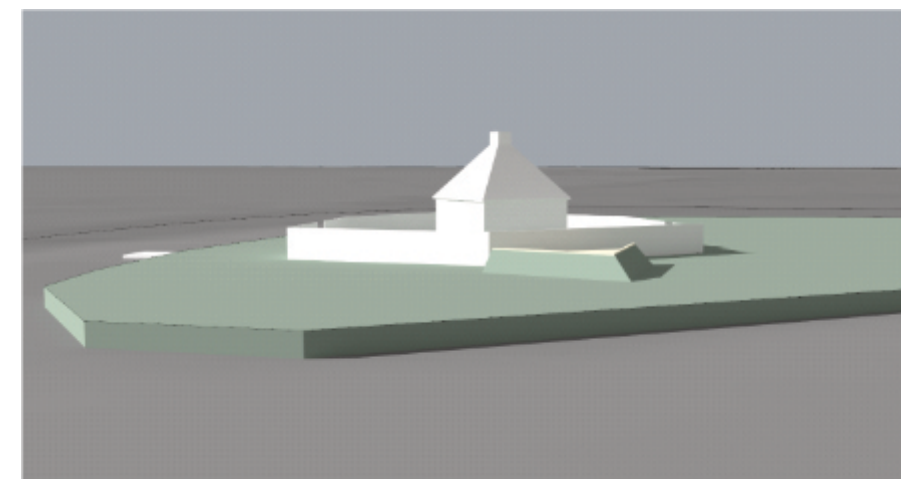
The two-bastion redoubt of Bonerschans with surrounding moat and defensive walls, courtesy of Hans van Westing



Digital model of two-bastion fort with blockhouse, surrounding moat, and entry bridge. An elaborate design of this type would seem to have attracted more attention than the Fort Good Hope described as "little," and "slight."



Digital model of a much simpler fort design utilizing a ravelin for the placement of the two cannons assigned to Fort Good Hope. The polygon shaped palisade wall surrounding the blockhouse may have provided better use of the surrounding available land.



Digital model of the final design chosen for the painting of Fort Good Hope. Note the elimination of the entry guardhouse attached to the curtain wall. This conjectural layout would satisfy most of the criteria ascribed to a "little" or "slight" fort accommodating 14 or 15 soldiers.

Small-bore cannons on naval gun carriages, like the 9-pounder depicted in the sketch, were mounted on earthen ravelins or earth-filled bastions and placed on a foundation of stone and planks, thus allowing the guns to be easily repositioned.

Drawn by L. F. Tamillo



THE PAINTING

By 1614 Adrian Block had explored and recorded a region of North America with enormous potential for the profitable international fur trade. Block mapped three rivers that ran parallel to each other north and south from the Atlantic Ocean right into the heart of fur-trading tribal lands. The Dutch West India Company was established in 1621 and by the 1630s the Dutch had footholds on all three rivers with Manhattan as the hub of their developing colony of New Netherland.

Much of my time researching paintings depicting the history of New Netherland has been spent on determining the physical appearance of those colonial Dutch settlements. I made dozens of images with settings from the northern Hudson River to the tip of Manhattan, from Long Island to Cape May, into the Delaware River, and northward to New Castle and Wilmington. Missing in all my forty years of work was one of the three rivers of New Netherland, the Connecticut. I'm delighted to say that that omission was rectified by the Connecticut River Museum in 2022 when I was commissioned to undertake a painting depicting the 17th century site of Fort Good Hope in Hartford.

As I mentioned earlier, no one living today knows what Fort Good Hope looked like. Obviously, that includes me. Contained in this document and in the historical papers mentioned, is all the information I've been able to gather

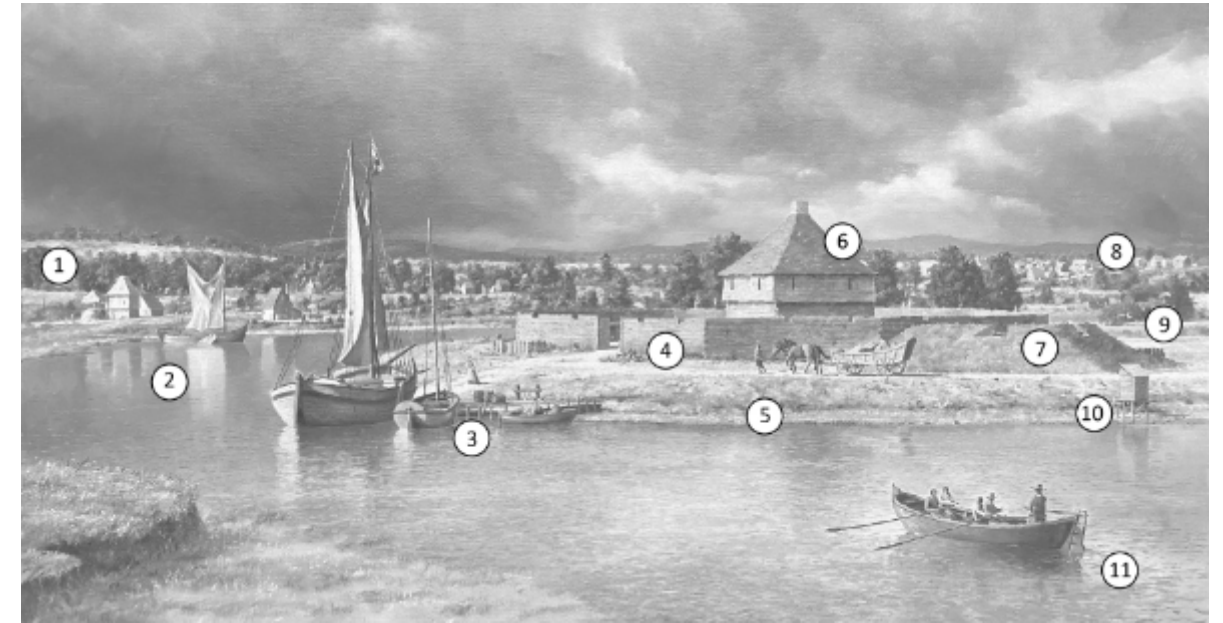
to base my painting upon. That data along with other insights came from my consultations with four outstanding historians, Charles Gehring, founder of the New Netherland Project, Jaap Jacobs, a leading authority on the workings of New Netherland, and noted historians and archaeologists, Hans van Westing and Oscar Hefting, whose careers have focused on the construction and location of Dutch forts around the globe. I must confess that in the end all decisions reflected in the final work were mine, so I herein apologize to my distinguished consultants for any omissions and glaring errors I've made in the painting. Although there is no way that this or any modern picture can accurately represent that time and place, I have tried to credibly capture its texture and tone. I'm convinced the fort was built on Dutch Point, that Dutch settlers established farms near the fort on the Little River, and that the English town of Hartford was a distinct feature in the immediate area. I've made those the key elements of the painting and believe them to be the essence of the story of the Dutch loss of influence along the Connecticut River.

Len Tantillo
February, 2023

Fort Good Hope, circa 1639
Oil on canvas panel, 16 x 30 inches
L. F. Tantillo, 2023



IMAGE KEY



1. Dutch farms near the fort
2. The Little River
3. Main Dock
4. Horizontal timber stockade walls
5. Dutch Point
6. The blockhouse with gun slots
7. Ravelin with two elevated cannons
8. The English settlement of Hartford
9. Cultivated land on Dutch Point
10. Shoreline privy
11. Access to the Connecticut River

