Mers-Amstel

THE COLONY OF THE CITY OF AMSTERDAM ON THE DELAWARE RIVER

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The Delaware River had been discovered by the Dutch in 1614 and had been named Zuidrivier (South River) by them. For the consolidation of their authority they built a fortress called Nassau, which also served as a trading post this was situated close to the present city of Philadelphia. The region, however, did not remain in their undisturbed possession. In 1638 Sweden fitted out an expedition, consisting of two ships under the command of Pieter Minuit, the former Director-General of New Netherland. The Swedish company which sponsored the venture, was by no means a purely Swedish enterprise. Among those who had interests in it, was Samuel Bloemaert , an Amsterdam merchant and a Director of the West India Company. The permits which had been issued to him and to Samuel Godin in 1630 and 1631 for the exploitation of certain sections of land along the Delaware River, will to some extent have been the reason why this so-called Swedish expedition, which was for a great part made up of Dutchmen, succeeded in firmly settling there. Notwithstanding the protests of the Director-General of New Netherland, a fortress was con-

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^{*}He was also a partner in the patroonship Rensselaerswijck, on the Hudson.

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structed on the right bank of the Delaware, near the Minquas Kill; it received the name Christina (now Wilmington). As regards the control of the river and the important fur trade with the Indians, this fort was situated more favourably than Fort Nassau. The Swedish colony New Sweden had some years in which to develop, since the political situation in Europe governed the mutual relations between the Swedish and Dutch colonies in America. After the Peace of Munster, however, the more or less allied relationship between the two countries became somewhat looser and in 1651 Pieter Stuyvesandt, then Director-General of New Netherland was instructed to effect a settlement of the frontier with the Swedes. He used this opportunity to strenghten the position of the West India Company against the Swedes. Fort Nassau was demolished and immediately after this, he caused the fortress Casimir to be constructed just below the Swedish Fort Christina. On July 19, 1651 he purchased the stretch of land on the Delaware lying between Christina Creek and the mouth of the river at Bombay Hook (Boompjes Hoek) from the Indians. Thus the Dutch regained control of the Delaware River. A newly-arrived Swedish governor did find this pincer-like arrangement to his liking and, in 1654, took possession of Fort Casimir. However, Stuyvesandt was not the man to decline this kind of challenge. An expedition commanded by him , set out after divine service on Sunday, September 5, 1655: the whole Swedish colony was overrun by the Dutch, without a single blow having been struck.

The West India Company however, lacked the means required to give the colony of New Netherland the kind of support it needed. The motive originally had been to turn New England into a kind of (Roman) province, as had been done in the East Indies. But in the neighbouring English and French colonies a different policy was pursued and the emigrants that poured into these colonies (usually as the result of the religious differences and bad economic conditions at home), thus

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made these territories increasingly populous. The resultant power that was formed was a threat to the Dutch colony. The slogan became "populate or sink". But the old policy of the Dutch West India Company required its sharp edges to be thoroughly trimmed before the conditions for settling in New Netherland were sufficiently favourable to exercise the requisite attraction on would-be settlers. The war, the loss of Brazil and Guinea as well as the expedition against the Swedes had increased the load of debt by which the West India Company was burdened. The desire to tender some relief to the Company felt by Amsterdam, together with considerations of an economic nature, moved the City Council to approach the Directors of the West India Company. The idea of having a colony of their own was taking root with the City Fathers. During a meeting of the Town Council on February 12, 1656, delegates were appointed to start negotiations with the Directors of the Amsterdam Chamber. The latter then pointed out to the Council delegates that the government of New Netherland had been placed in their hands and that this will prove to be of advantage in the negotiations. Of New Netherland they write: " ... that the climate is extremely temperate and healthy, being altogether compatible with the humour of the inhabitants of these countries (the Netherlands): also naturally capable of producing all manner of oriental fruits and vegetation, apart from the trading facilities which in several ways increase daily, both with the natives of the country and with the neighbouring Englishmen". 1 Owing to sundry material difficulties, the Company was unable to promote the populating of the colony at the requisite rate. The emigrants required free passage for themselves and their families. They

^{1...} dat het climaet seer getempert en gesont is, 't eenemaele overeencomende met de humeuren van de ingesetenen van dese landen, oock uijtter nature bequaem om
allerhande Oosterse vruchten en gewassen te produceren,
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had to be kept fed and clothed during one year and supplied with agricultural implements and seeds. It had already been suggested that the City of Amsterdam should establish its colony on the South River (Delaware) around Fort Casimir (New Castle). The land there was quite good, but sparsely populated. In a previous discussion a stretch of land, situated on the South River near the forts Elsenburg and Nassau, and one on the North River (Hudson), near Fort Orange, had also been discussed.

On March 3, 1656, the Burgomasters reported to the Council: "... that in New Netherland, in the event of sufficient men being sent thither from these countries, all that which comes at present from the East (the Baltic), even including masts, might be found and cultivated". They moreover pointed out that the Company had purchased the land it possessed there from the "savages or inhabitants". The Council, "... judging it most expedient that, in the prevailing situation of the times, the trade in New Netherland be proceeded with so as not to be constantly and solely dependent on the Baltic" thereupon authorised Burgomasters and Treasurers to negotiate the purchase of a section of land in New Netherland with the Directors.

The conditions upon which Amsterdam admitted colonists who were willing to settle in its colony on the Delaware River may certainly be called acceptable. The City found the shipping space and arranged the passages for the colonists, while these also enjoyed food and clothing for a period of one year. The cost of all this was later to be recovered from them. All the products shipped by the colonists to Amsterdam were to be stored

^{1...}dat in Nieuw Nederlandt, ingevalle maer menschen genoegh van dese landen derwaerts aengesonden wierden, soude connen gevonden ende aengequeeckt werden allen 't gene jegenwoordig uijt Oosten vandaen comt, tot masten incluys.

^{2...} hoognoodig oordeelend dat de handel in dese constitutie der tijden in Nieuw Nederlandt worde voortgeset, omme niet altoos ende alleen van d'Oostzee te dependeren

in one of the City's warehouses and sold on behalf of the owners. To settle their debts, an amount of 10% at the most was to be deducted from the nett revenue and the City was also to charge a commission fee of 2%. The City moreover ordered the government, the administration of justice and the maintenance of the schoolmaster; when the number of emigrants had duly increased, a parson would be sent as well. A smith, a wagon-maker and a carpenter would be at the service of the colonists. The City was to provide seeds, building materials, etc. The colonists were permitted free timber felling, hunting and fishing; in case minerals were found, they were to have the rights of mining for ten years to come.

The agreement between the City Council and the Company was ratified on August 16, 1656 by the States General. The City had taken a great many burdens upon itself. In Fort Casimir, manned by the Company's soldiers up to that time, City soldiers would now have to be lodged. Martin Krijger, a man of some experience of New Netherland and who had already visited the South River, was appointed Captain of the forty-five City soldiers; his Lieutenant was Alexander d'Hinoyossa, who had served several years in Brazil. As Director of the City colony was appointed Jacob Alrichs, also a man with Brazilian experience. V Commissioners and Directors for the government of the colony on the South River in New Netherland were appointed by the Burgomasters, they were: the Seigniors Coenraad Burgh, (Councillor and former Justice) , Hendrik Roeters (Chief Commissioner of the Bank of Exchange), Eduard Man, Isaac van Beeck, Hector Pietersz., and Joan Taijspil. The City then had to start paying out, as would so often be the case later on. To meet the direct expenditure the sum of f 25 000 .was voted by the Council. When a number of colonists had been gathered together, the ship "Prins Maurits" was chartered to transport colonists, Director and the

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appointed a

^{*}He was also one of the partners in the Rensselaerswyck patroonship, but sold his share in 1632.

military. On December 25, 1656 this ship with 129 souls on board, set sail from Texel to the promised land. The voyage was made in convoy with the ships "De Beer" and "De Geldersche Blom". The convoy having been scattered by a storm, however, the "Prins Maurits" was forced to proceed on its own; this was most unfortunate since neither the master, Dirck Cornelisz. Honingh nor any of his officers had ever been to New Netherland. On March 8, 1657 the ship ran aground on the Long Island foreshore. Passangers, crew and a part of the cargo were brought on land safely, but the ship was a total loss. In some yachts, parts of the salvaged cargo was brought Manhattan but timber, bricks, tiles, lime, forge-coal, etc., had to be abandoned. Manhattan the ship "De Vergulde Bever" was chartered, but it could not set sail until April 16; on April 25, 1657 the colonists set foot in the new colony.

It had been decided beforehand that Fort Casimir and the colony should bear the name of Nieuwer-Amstel.*

The land, on the Delaware River, together with Fort Casimir was formally transferred by Pieter Stuyvesandt to Jacob Alrichs, acting for the Burgomasters of Amsterdam, on April 12, 1657. The land was the same tract which Pieter Stuyvesandt had bought from the Indians on July 19, 1651. On May 8 Jacob Alrighs, writing from the "Fortresse Nieuwer-Amstel", informs the Burgomasters of Amsterdam that he has taken possession of the colony and the fort on April 25, 1657; with him then are 125 souls. The 38 soldiers with their Captain and Lieutenant arrived om May 1st, having made the journey overland from Manhattan. The imported goods had to be stored in tents.

After this, twenty-five plots were allocated by Jacob Alrichs to the colonists. Upon arrival in the colony they found twenty families, mostly Swedes and five or six families of Dutch nationality living there.

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soldiers with their vives and children for down mid regards were non-productive customers of the City stoudouse, and some meditioned

The fort was in a ruinous condition. The lack of the materials which had either been lost or else left behind in Manhattan, made itself felt almost at once. After two years, the roof of Alrichs' house had only been tiled for one-third. Victuals had to be augmented with deermeat: during those years thousands of deer were shot there. There was, however, an almost immediate shortage of so-called dry victuals. + The City "magazine" (shop) had to deal with a great many unproductive consumers: the soldiers with their wives and children (occasionally with maidservants) were hardly moductive profitable customers. New colonists continued to arrive regularly though. In October 1658 Alrichs writes: "... here (in Nieuwer-Amstel) are now about 600 souls, among whom many quarrelsome folk, who make sufficient trouble". The quality of the newly-arrived emigrants was none too good. "Many that come hither are as poor as worms, and lazy to boot."2 Comparatively few of the new arrivals were capable of doing agricultural work. The City Fathers then sent out poorhouse orphans the to the colony; such children came in very useful and were all soon apprenticed, but those under fifteen and the weaklings among them could not be employed. The City colony did not prosper, harvest failure, heavy rains, sickness and the behaviour of the British all contributed to its decline. In 1658 the prevalent fevers had already caused the deaths of about one hundred persons, owing to which many families were left unsupported. In August 1659 there were 110 houses and some public buildings. The number of really good

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farmers was estimated as being three! For the rest a

^{1...} hier (N-A) sijn nu omtrent 600 zielen, daeronder veel harich volck daer men genoech mede te stellen heeft.

² Veele die hier comen sijn soo arm als wormen en luij

^{*}I.e., beans, peas and dried cereal foods.

⁺⁺ Aalmoezeniers weeskinderen: the English equivalent would be "workhouse orphans".

total of 137 artisans (most of whom did not know their jobs), 70 soldiers and 300 women and children, had come into the colony.

With one thing and another, the City was losing money. The debts which many colonists had contracted to the City Council were never paid. At the end of the year 1660 Amsterdam had already advanced more than 150 000 guilders in subsidies. This made it necessary to alter the conditions for the colonists. The "year of grace", so called by the colonists because during that time the costs of food and clothing were advanced to them, was curtailed. To cover its expenditure the city was obliged to levy an interest of 50% on the cargoes sent over to the colony. When one no longer owed anything to the City, one was at liberty to trade all products (excepting furs) wherever and with whomsoever one wished. The City Commissioners feared that the colonists were out to shear the sheep " ... while this City may shear the pigs".1

From a calculation of costs drawn up in 1659, it would appear that the differences between transport costs by charter ship and by private ship were negligible As a rule, however, transports were arranged in private ships. Since the abovementioned calculation is also of import for other reasons, a translation of it has been appended to this article.

A small church was built ## Ds (the Reverend) Eeverardus Welius installed there as incumbent (he died December 9, 1659). The bell weighing 242 pounds and bought in 1661, was supplied by Jan Moors and was obviously destined for this church. The ironwork needed for a sawmill with 24 blades, was brought over to Nieuwer-Amstel in the ship "De Purmerlanderkerck" in 1662. To recruit colonists, the conditions for settling in the City colony were posted in the Betuwe and on the Veluwe. + After the death of Jacob Alrichs

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^{1 ...} ende dese stadt de verckens scheren sullen.

^{*}Two districts in Guelderland where the peasant population was particularly indigent.

(at New Castle, December 30, 1659), Alexander d'Hindyossa became Director of Nieuwer-Amstel. The vexations which the City had experienced with its colony led to discussions in which it was suggested that the whole venture be returned to the West India Company, but the latter could not shoulder such an extra burden. As a result of this, the City began to tackle the problem with a better spirit. The quality of emigrant was more carefully considered. The Company, on their side, were also obliged to make a few concessions and the territory of the colony was considerably extended. On December 22, 1663, the whole of the South River (Delaware), from the mouth of the river upwards, as far as the river ran and inland, on the East bank up to the frontiers of the British colony of Maryland, were transferred to the City of Amsterdam. This area today embraces the whole of the State of Delaware and parts of the States of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. fortress Aletena (formerly Fort Christina, the present Wilmington) too, was included in the City's domain.

On June 9, 1662, the City concluded and agreement with Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy, who was to depart for the colony with 25 Mennonite families. They received a loan of f 2 500. - and settled at Whorekill the former Swaanendael patroonship), to establish their Utopia. Apparently during these years the City outgrew its colonial teething troubles: Amsterdam no longer had to bear the costs of exploiting Nieuwer-Amstel alone, the City Commissioners for the colony also found themselves sharing in what was sent over from it. They and the City were each to have one half share in everything. In the trade cargoes that had lately been sent to the colony, however, the City participated for only one-quarter and this shows that, from the point of view of the insiders - the City Commissioners - the belief that the colony would eventually pay its way, was gaining placed Arust in the large power productionly of the colony of the lay that are re-named Lewes Creek. Their colony,

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In September 1664 New England as well as the City colony Nieuwer-Amstel were taken by the English. Since d'Hinoyossa would not yield to them without resistance the township was looted. The fortress was stormed and the City's soldiers carried away as prisoners. In December 1665, the former Director d'Hinoyossa writes that, owing to the resistance he offered to the British, he has lost all his property while Stuyvesandt, by yielding voluntarily, has been able to retain all his possessions. The only privilege granted by the City to the colonists was that, upon their settling in Amsterdam, they received on demand, the citizenship of that City.

The City Interests

The City Council was ever conscious of the fact that the prosperity of Amsterdam was based on commerce. on merchanting. The City government has, in favourable times, never hesistated to pursue and active commercial policy- When as a result of a shift in economic power, changes occurred, efforts were made to adjust matters accordingly. The foundation of the colony of Nieuwer-Amstel was not intended as an effort to obtain more power for the City. V "And while the government of Amsterdam has no intention whatsoever to set up any authority or power abroad, but is only minded to promote the continuation of that commerce, the which is the soul of this state,"1 was written in one of their reports. Neither can it be said that the City was trying to rid itself of the unproductive part of its inhabitants, since only a negligible percentage of the colonists came from Amsterdam itself. Even in the very first of the Council Resolutions the hope is expressed that from the colony products would be obtainable which, up to that time, were imported almost exclusively from the

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lende dewijl de regieringe van Amsterdam niet en heeft eenig insicht, om eenige authoriteijt off macht uyt te setten buytenslants, maer haer insicht alleen streckt tot voortzettinge van de commercie twelck de ziel is van desen staet ...

in 1654 the warlike Charles X had succeeded Queen Christina on the Swedish throne. A quarrel with Poland was the reason for Charles to invade that country and this caused considerable confusion throughout the Baltic region. Denmark was no match for him, the Polish plains, granaries of the West, threatened to be isolated. Amsterdam saw its most important commercial task menaced: the Baltic trade. It therefore seized the opportunity of making itself independent of the Baltic countries. In a letter from the City Commissioners addressed to Jacob Alrichs we read: "... promoting the cultivation of the lands is the principal, yea, the sole design of this City in establishing the colony there". At the very moment when the first important shipments of wheat were to be despatched to Amsterdam, the English overran the country.

Timber was also shipped from New Netherland. The first cargoes of timber which arrived in Amsterdam from Nieuwer-Amstel, however, were poor in quality. The results of the sales did not cover half the freights. Transport costs of shipment from New Netherland were considerably higher than those from the Baltic. For bulk goods in particular, freight costs are an important factor. It is a moot question whether truly active competition with the Baltic region for these articles would have been achieved in the long run. But the liberty to trade from New Netherland with other, nearer ports, which had been granted to the colonists, was certainly important to them.

With the increase of the population a far from unimportant distribution area for dry goods, wines, etc.,

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^{1...} de bevorderinge van de cultuijre der landen het voornaemste jae 't eenichste oogmerck waeromme dese stadt die colonie aldaar heeft gestabilieert.

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was acquired. Before their invasion, aggreat deal of trade was carried on with the British; dry goods were sold to them in exchange for tobacco. In this way the tobacco from the British colonies could be put directly on the Amsterdam market. The City itself had established the brewery at Nieuwer-Amstel; here a beer of especial strenth, much beloved of the English, was brewed.

The expansion of the colony had been calculated so as to obtain greater production at relatively small expense. Several Swedish settlements had thus come to lie within the City colony, while trade with the British colonies was facilitated by it. This latter advantage, however, was a cause of great dissatisfaction to the British colonial governments.

Among the colonists that emigrated to Nieuwer-Amstel during it final years as a City colony, were a number of Finns. The fact that the Lutheran church was more or less tolerated in the former Swedish settlements was important to them. In the past years the attitude towards the modes of worship of non-Calvinists had become a good deal milder and this attracted divers emigrants, including some from the English colonies. And a possible further argument for enlarging the City colony was the fact that copper and other minerals had meanwhile been discovered just outside its former frontiers.

The supplies of furs were of great importance to the colony's trade. The otter- and fox pelts brought over were re-sold into Germany via Hamburg. For the trade with Russia, beaver skins were one of the principal articles. In Russia these pelts were made into Castor-wool and, in its turn, the castor-wool was sold via Amsterdam into France.

The political trend discernible in the development of the City colony during these eight years is that the West India Company was persistently and continuously elbowed further aside.

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Appendix I. Anno 1659, this day, 27 June in Amsterdam. Calculation of what it shall come to cost for transporting and carrying over in a ship, to be chartered for that purpose, 100 souls, colonists and other artisans to this City's colony in New Netherland, together with all that it shall be required to send besides, to wit: To provisions or victuals for 100 heads for transport to the colony (according to the 3 article of the conditions, in which the City offers to pay the passage monies in the form of a loaned advance), computed for a period of three months, at 6 stivers daily To merchandise for trading cattle (only in the highest need, should the cultivation of the lands not be possible without the same) the sum of cannot to promoted . f 1 500.-To clothing and commodities for the ware-house and other (since the same will at least have to be distributed to the soldiers on account, against their monthly pay, which is done with a 50 per cent. advance from the in teles of City, according to the practice in the like manner, of the Company) the sum of f 1 800.-To materials, ammunition and other small sundries 4 (required both for the making of public buildings and for the defence of f 2 500 .the inhabitants) the sum of

Note:

· per month

against the last item must be set the freight which the same ship could gain coming thisher from New Neth-

To freight for a ship to transport men and necessities for eix months firm at f 900 .-

· a period of are months

erland by the transport of private goods. And when no vessel should be chartered especially to this end and men and necessities could be transported

in a private ship, the same would come to cost as follows To board and transport money of 100 heads, averaged at 30 guilders f 3 000.-

To merchandise for trading cattle, as above f 1 500.-

To clothing and commodities for the warehouse ut supra as above. f 1 800.as above

To gratus materials, ammunition, etc ut supra f 2 500.-

To freight for transporting the aforesaid goods .

f 1 200 .-

f 5 400 .-

13 900 .-

Mun. arch., Amsterdam, Burg.Portf. no. 4, New Netherland ²Consisting of Flemish linen, narrow-width canvas, aniseed water (cordial), chest cordial, shoes and shirts

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to this city [Amsterday]

Appendix I (contd.)

³Consisting among other matters of greased leather shoes, stockings, hats, English and red caps, cloth, duffel, and baize.

⁴Consisting among other implements of locks, twohanded saws, iron pots and kettles, iron, steel, pantiles, bricks, lime, gunpowder and forge coal.

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