

**THE CENTENNIAL HISTORY  
OF NEW YORK CITY,  
FROM THE DISCOVERY TO  
THE PRESENT DAY**

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The Centennial History of New York City, from the Discovery to the Present Day by William L. Stone

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**WILLIAM L. STONE**

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*Discovery to the Present Day.*

By WILLIAM L. STONE.

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# HISTORY

OF

## NEW YORK CITY.

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THE HISTORY OF NEW YORK NATURALLY DIVIDES ITSELF INTO THREE PERIODS OF TIME:—*First*—FROM ITS SETTLEMENT BY THE DUTCH TO ITS PERMANENT OCCUPANCY BY THE ENGLISH; *Second*—FROM THE ENGLISH CONQUEST TO THE CLOSE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR; AND, *Third*—FROM ITS EVACUATION BY THE BRITISH DOWN TO THE PRESENT DAY.

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### FIRST PERIOD.

1598-1674.

The settlement of New York Island by the Dutch, and its permanent occupancy by the English.

It is the general belief that the first landing made on New York Island, or the "Island of Manhattan," as it was then called, was by Hendrick Hudson, in 1609. This, however, is not the case; since the earliest records extant state that as early as 1598, a few Hollanders, in the employ of a Greenland Company, were in the habit of resorting to New Netherlands (*i. e.* New York), not, it is true, with a design of effecting a settlement, but merely to secure a shelter during the winter months. With this view they built two small forts, to protect themselves against the Indians. Nevertheless, the fact remains undisputed, that to Hudson belongs the honor of being the first one who directed public attention to the Island of Manhattan as an advantageous point for a trading port in the New World.

On the 4th of April, 1609, the great navigator sailed out of the harbor of Amsterdam, and "by twelve of ye clocke" of the 6th he was two leagues off the land. He was in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, who had commissioned him to seek a passage to the East Indies by the north side of Nova Zembla. Having, however, found the sea at that part full of ice, he turned the prow of his little vessel, the *Half-Moon*, westward, and, after a month's cruise, reached the great Bank of Newfoundland, on the 2d of July. Thence he sailed southward to the James River, Virginia, and again altering his course—still in pursuit of a

new channel to India—he coasted along the shores of New Jersey, and on the 2d of September, 1609, cast anchor inside of Sandy Hook.

The topography of New York Island, as it was first seen by Hudson, was as follows :

“ The lower part of it consisted of wood-crowned hills and beautiful grassy valleys, including a chain of swamps and marshes and a deep pond. Northward, it rose into a rocky, high ground. The sole inhabitants were a tribe of dusky Indians,—an off-shoot from the great nation of the Lenni Lenape, who inhabited the vast territory bounded by the Penobscot and Potomac, the Atlantic and Mississippi,—dwelling in the clusters of rude wigwams that dotted here and there the surface of the country. The rivers that gird the Island were as yet unstirred by the keels of ships, and the bark canoes of the native Manhattans held sole possession of the peaceful waters.

“ The face of the country, more particularly described, was gently undulating, presenting every variety of hill and dale, of brook and rivulet. The upper part of the Island was rocky, and covered by a dense forest; the lower part grassy, and rich in wild fruit and flowers. Grapes and strawberries grew in abundance in the fields, and nuts of various kinds were plentiful in the forests, which were also filled with abundance of game. The brooks and ponds were swarming with fish, and the soil was of luxuriant fertility. In the vicinity of the present “ Tombs ” was a deep, clear, and beautiful pond of fresh water (with a picturesque little island in the middle)—so deep, indeed, that it could have floated the largest ship in our navy,—which was for a long time deemed bottomless by its possessors. This was fed by large springs at the bottom, which kept its waters fresh and flowing, and had its outlet in a little stream which flowed into the East River, near the foot of James street. Smaller ponds dotted the Island in various places, two of which, lying near each other, in the vicinity of the present corner of the Bowery and Grand street, collected the waters of the high grounds which surrounded them. To the northwest of the Fresh Water Pond, or “ Kolck,” as it afterwards came to be called, beginning in the vicinity of the present St. John’s Park, and extending to the northward over an area of some seventy acres, lay an immense marsh, filled with reeds and brambles, and tenanted with frogs and water-snakes. A little rivulet connected this marsh with the Fresh Water Pond, which was also connected, by the stream which formed its outlet, with another strip of marshy land, covering the region now occupied by James, Cherry, and the adjacent streets. An unbroken chain of waters was thus stretched across the Island from James street at the southeast to Canal street at the northwest. An inlet occupied the place of Broad street, a marsh covered the vicinity of Ferry street, Rutgers street formed the center of another marsh, and a long line of meadows and swampy ground stretched to the northward along the eastern shore.

"The highest line of lands lay along Broadway, from the Battery to the northernmost part of the Island, forming its backbone, and sloping gradually to the east and west. On the corner of Grand street and Broadway was a high hill, commanding a view of the whole Island, and falling off gradually to the Fresh Water Pond. To the south and west, the country, in the intervals of the marshes, was of great beauty—rolling, grassy, fertile, and well watered. A high range of sand hills traversed a part of the Island, from Varick and Charlton to Eighth and Greene streets. To the north of these lay a valley, through which ran a brook, which formed the outlet of the springy marshes at Washington Square, and emptied into the North River at the foot of Hammersly street."\*

Meanwhile, Hudson, having explored the river that bears his name as far as the present City of Albany, set sail on the 4th of October for Europe, bearing the news of the discovery of a new country—the opening for a new *commerce*; for although his patrons were disappointed in finding a short road to the land of silks, teas, and spices, still, his great discovery was destined to open in future time mines of wealth, more valuable than all the imagined riches of the Celestial Empire.

At that period, Holland carried on a lucrative trade with the East Indies and Russia. Every year they dispatched nearly one hundred ships to Archangel for furs; but Hudson's glowing accounts of the rich peltry he had seen in the newly discovered regions soon turned the attention of the busy Dutch to a country where these articles could be purchased without the taxes of custom-houses and other duties. Accordingly, in the year 1610, a few merchants dispatched another vessel, under the command of the *Half-Moon's* former mate, to traffic in furs with the Indians. This venture met with such success, that two years after, in 1612, the *Fortune* and the *Tiger*, commanded, respectively, by Hendrick Christiaensen and Adrien Block, sailed on a trading voyage to the "Mauritius River," as the Hudson was first named. The following year, also, three more vessels, commanded by Captains De Witt, Volckertsen, and Wey, sailed from Amsterdam and Hoven on a similar adventure. These were the beginnings of the important fur trade, which was, ere long, to be a chief source of wealth to Holland and America. It was now determined to open a regular communication with the newly-discovered region, and to make the Island of Manhattan the *dépot* of the fur trade in America. It was also resolved to establish permanent agents here for the purchase and collection of skins, while the vessels were on their voyages to and from Holland. Captain Hendrick Christiaensen became the first agent, and built a redoubt, with four small houses, on ground which, it is said, is now the site of No. 39 Broadway.

A little navy was commenced about the same period, by Captain

\* Miss M. L. Booth's History of New York.



Adrien Block, one of the vessels of which was accidentally burned, just on the eve of his departure for Holland. Having abundant materials, however, in the Island of Manhattan, he finished another; and in the spring of 1614, launched the first vessel ever built in New Amsterdam. She was named the *Restless*, a yacht of sixteen tons—a name prophetic of the ever-busy and future great city. The entire winter passed in building the vessel, the Indians kindly supplying the strangers with food. Such were the earliest movements of commerce in New Netherlands two centuries and a half ago!

A few months before Captain Block's return to Holland, the States-General of the Netherlands, with a view of encouraging emigration, passed an ordinance granting the discoverers of new countries the exclusive privilege of trading at Manhattan during four voyages. Accordingly, the merchants who had sent out the first expedition had a map made of all the country between Canada and Virginia, as the whole new region was called, and, claiming to be the original discoverers, petitioned the Government for the promised monopoly. Their petition was granted; and on the 11th of October, 1614, they obtained a charter for the exclusive right of trade on the territory within the 40th and 45th degrees of north latitude. The charter also forbade all other persons to interfere with this monopoly, in the penalty of confiscating both, vessels and cargoes, with a fine also of 50,000 Dutch ducats for the benefit of the charter's grantees. The new province first formally received the name of *New Netherland* in this document; and Dutch merchants, associating themselves under the name of the "United New Netherland Company," straightway prepared to conduct their operations on a more extensive scale. Trading parties to the interior hastened to collect furs from the Indians, and deposit them at Forts Nassau (Albany) and Manhattan. Jacob Eelkins, a shrewd trader, received the appointment of agent at the former place, where the first one, Captain Christiaensen, had been murdered by an Indian. This was the first murder ever recorded in the new province.

In the year 1617, a formal treaty of peace and alliance was concluded between the Dutch and the powerful nation of the Iroquois. The pipe of peace was smoked, and the hatchet buried in the earth, on the present site of Albany. This treaty, as may readily be imagined, greatly increased the prosperity of the Dutch traders, who had hitherto occupied Manhattan merely by the sufferance of the Indians. Their agents accordingly at once extended their trips further into the interior, obtaining on each trip valuable furs in exchange for the muskets and ammunition so much coveted by the natives. This trade became so profitable, that when the charter of the United New Netherland Company expired, in 1618, they petitioned for a renewal, but failing to obtain it, they continued their trade two or three years longer, under a special license.

Up to this period, the Hollanders had considered Manhattan as a

trading post only, and dwelt in mere temporary huts of rude construction. But the British now explored the American coast, claiming the whole region between Canada and Virginia, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans; and the Dutch, consequently, began to realize the importance of securing their American possessions in the new province. The English Puritans, hearing glowing accounts of New Netherland, requested permission to emigrate there with their families. But the States-General, having other plans in view, declined the prayers of the Puritans. They thought it better policy to supply the new province with their own countrymen, and on the 3d of June, 1621, granted a charter to the West India Company for twenty years, which conferred upon them the exclusive jurisdiction over New Netherland. It may well be questioned whether the States-General acted wisely in the course thus pursued. Had it filled the land, as the English were doing, with crowds of hardy, moral emigrants and pioneers—farmers, with their cattle and husbandry—the Dutch settlements would have advanced with far greater rapidity. Be this, however, as it may, the West India Company no sooner became possessed of the charter, than it at once became a power in the new country. Having the exclusive right of trade and commerce in the Atlantic, from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope, upon the eastern continent, and from Newfoundland to Magellan Straits, on the western, their influence over this immense territory was almost boundless in making contracts with the Indians, building forts, administering justice, and appointing public officers. In return, the chartered Company pledged itself to colonize the new territory. The government of this association was vested in five separate chambers or boards of management, in five principal Dutch cities: Amsterdam, Middleburg, Dordrecht, one in North Holland, and one in Friesland. The details of its management were intrusted to an executive board of nineteen, commonly called the *Assembly of Nineteen*. The States-General further promised, on its part, to give the Company a million of guilders, and in case of war, to supply ships and men. Meanwhile, the Puritans, not disheartened, reached Plymouth Rock, and thus conveyed their faith and traffic to the shores of New England, where they continue to this day.

The West India Company now began to colonize the new province with fresh zeal. The Amsterdam Chamber, in 1623, fitted out a ship of 250 tons, the *New Netherland*, in which thirty families embarked for the distant territory whose name she bore. Captain Wey commanded the expedition, having been appointed the first Director of the province. Most of these colonists were *Walloons*, or French Protestants, from the borders of France and Belgium, and sought a home from religious persecutions in their own land.

With the arrival of the *New Netherland*, a new era in the domestic history of the settlement began. Soon saw-mills supplied the necessary timber for comfortable dwellings, in the place of the bark-huts built after

the Indian fashion. The new buildings were generally one-story high, with two rooms on a floor, and a thatched roof garret. From the want of brick and mortar, the chimneys were constructed of wood. The interior was, as a matter of course, very scantily supplied with furniture—the great chest from *Fatherland*, with its prized household goods, being the most imposing article. Tables were generally the heads of barrels placed on end; rough shelves constituted the cupboard, and chairs were logs of wood rough-hewn from the forest. To complete the furniture, there was the well known "*Sloop Bench*," or sleeping-bench—the bedstead—where lay the boast, the pride, the comfort of a Dutch housekeeper, the feather-bed. Around the present Battery and Coenties Slip and the Bowling Green were the houses, a few of which were surrounded by gardens. The fruit-trees often excited the thievish propensities of the natives, and one devastating war followed the shooting of an Indian girl while stealing peaches from an orchard on Broadway, near the present Bowling Green. Meanwhile, commerce kept pace with the new houses, and the staunch ship, the *New Netherland*, returned to Holland with a cargo of furs valued at \$12,000.

Anxious to fulfill its part of the agreement, the West India Company, in 1625, also sent out to Manhattan three ships and a yacht, containing a number of families, armed with farming implements, and 103 head of cattle. Fearing the cattle might be lost in the surrounding forests, the settlers landed them on Nutten's (Governor's) Island, but afterward conveyed them to Manhattan. Two more vessels shortly after arrived from Holland, and the settlement soon numbered some 200 persons, and gave promise of permanency.

In the year 1624, Wey, returning to Holland, William Verhulst succeeded him in the Directorship. The latter, however, did not long enjoy the emoluments of office, for at the end of a year he also was recalled, and Peter Minuit appointed, in his place, Director-General of New Netherland, with full power to organize a provisional government. He arrived May 4, 1626, in the ship *Saamen*, Adrian Jovis, captain. The first seal was now granted to the province, having for a crest, a beaver, than which, for a coat of arms, nothing could have been more appropriate. It was fitting that the earliest Hollanders of the "Empire City" should thus honor the animal that was so fast enriching them in their newly-adopted home.

To the credit of Director Minuit, be it said, the very first act of his administration was to purchase in an open and honorable manner the Island of Manhattan from the Indians for sixty guilders, or twenty-four dollars. The Island itself was estimated to contain 22,000 acres. The price paid, it is true, was a mere trifle, but the purchase itself was lawful and satisfactory to the aboriginal owners—a fact which cannot be truly said in regard to other regions taken from the Indians.