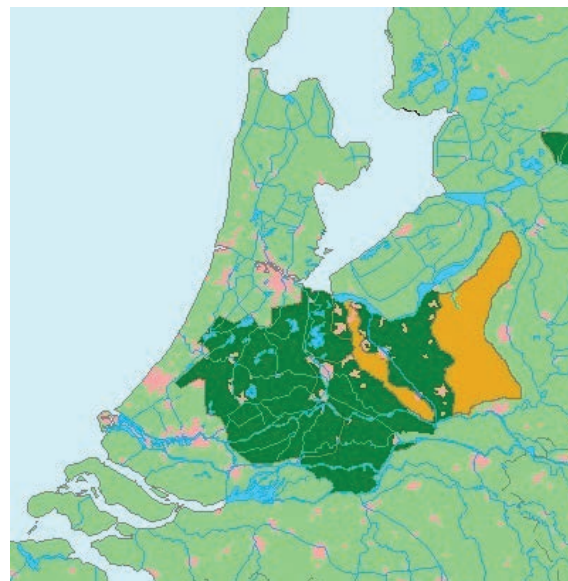


# Living with Rivers

by Leo Schreuders



*The Netherlands Plain.*

**I**N THE SUMMER of 2013, my wife and I, tourists from the Netherlands, were taken to places in New York and New Jersey like Esopus, Kinderhook, Middleburgh, and Mahwah, where we saw farms linked to the early modern Dutch. The key? The founding dates of local Dutch Reformed Churches. We followed the trail of the descendants of farmers from the Netherlands Plain, the western end of the low lying Northern European Plain, which led us to an exciting entrance into a world of historic heritage with a distinct Dutch flavor not often mentioned in tourist brochures.

Could I replicate this experience in the Netherlands by setting out an itinerary using the family and place names mentioned in New Netherland documents? Working with this concept, a key opened another door into an iconic world of rectangular plots cultivated a thousand years ago in Europe—a world with a trail that led to the oldest Dutch farming communities, the first stone farmsteads situated on the ribbon-like lands bisected by canals and dikes. Around these Dutch villages American family names such as Koeymans and Van de Water in Schoonrewoerd, Cool in Vianen, or Ten Eyck in Huinen literally fell into place. Some place names also fell into place, like Bern or Kortgericht, not Swiss

*Leo Schreuders is a recently retired economist, although he continues to lecture at the postgraduate school of accountancy at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He has worked in financial institutions as well as in various governmental ministries, including the Ministry of Finance. He most recently facilitated in the quality of the audit profession in the Far East through the Ministry of Development Cooperation. His previous publications are in the field of accounting.*

Spring 2017

nor Belgian but Dutch names situated in the polders. We toured the plain, a centuries old network landscaped by men of the historic bishopric of Utrecht, of which Gelder Valley polder villages such as Huinen, Hell, Voorthuizen, and Wekerom were a part.

To a large extent the Dutch settlers in New Netherland were farmers. They made the early modern American mid-Atlantic region a success, duplicating the Dutch agricultural powerhouse overseas. This article highlights the Netherlands Plain as the principle place of origin for immigrants to New Netherland by mapping out the émigré villages. Another focus is to unveil motives for emigration, some of a circumstantial nature, a few based on more personal observations.

## Mapping Out the Émigré Villages in the Netherlands Plain:

The distribution of Dutch Reformed churches, Dutch toponyms, architectural heritage, and early census data show a distinct Dutch cultural landscape in parts of New York State and New Jersey, especially along the waterways. Here we find the records of the first generation of European farmers on Manhattan and Long Island, in Albany, Kingston, Hurley, Schenectady, Bergen, and Aqueckenok, places that still echo an origin in the Netherlands. Later generations left traces of Dutch origins in village or family histories. When analyzing these sources, it appears that more than half to possibly two thirds of the settlers came from the rural villages of the Netherlands Plain, situated in the bog region around the city of Utrecht and the town of Meppel (in respectively thirty and fifteen-mile radiuses). Five regions that stand out in terms of numbers of emigrants: the Islands, the Rhine-Lek, the Eem-Gelder Valley,<sup>1</sup> the Vecht, and Meppel.

To map out the émigré villages from where the settlers came, three documents were used for guidance. First, the “Sketch of Lands Division of the United Netherlands” was used as input for the administrative districts of the land following the United Provinces’ declaration of independence from Spain.<sup>2</sup> Second, the first Dutch census<sup>3</sup> provided insights into the size of émigré villages and the relative size of the emigrant groups.<sup>4</sup> The third document was a map made by J. Janssonius van Waesbergen in 1654 that shows the villages of origin of the settlers in their seventeenth-century landscape.<sup>5</sup>

The Netherlands Plain stretches out from the coastal sand ridges in the west to the higher sand grounds of the Veluwe in the east, bisected by the Utrecht Hill Ridge. To the south, the plain includes the river delta

<sup>1</sup> Including three villages of Barneveld Borough—Voorthuizen, Garderen, and Kootwyk, and three villages of Ede Borough—Lunteren, Bennekom, and Wekerom.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Christiaan Sepp, “De Vereenigde Nederlanden of Zeven Vrye Provinciën Gesloten in den Jaare 1579 te Utrecht in 1773,” *Nieuwe Geographische Nederlandsche Reise- en Zak-atlas* (Amsterdam, 1773), <http://www.wazamar.org/Nederlanden/VIIprovin1773/ut-1773.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Volks-Telling in de Nederlandsche Republiek. Uitgegeven op last der commissie tot het ontwerpen van een plan van contitutie voor het volk van Nederland. 1796. In den Haag ter ‘sLands Drukkery. Census 1795. Bylagen XXVI-LVI. The census reflects the mid-eighteenth-century size of agricultural villages that barely grew throughout the 1540–1795 period.

<sup>4</sup> NIDI, *Bevolkingatlas van Nederland: Demografische ontwikkelingen 1850 totheden* (Rijswijk, 2003), 8: “a max. of 1.9 Mn inhabitants was reached around 1650; the 1795 census shows 2.1 Mn, 11 percent higher than available estimates from the 1650s. This seems to correspond with the available estimates per town in the regions at hand, as based on tax returns [Paul Brusse, *Overleven door ondernemen: de agrarische geschiedenis van de Over-Betuwe 1650–1850* (Wageningen, 1999)].

<sup>5</sup> “Gelders Archief Dvcatsv Geldriae Dvcatsv Geldriae: novissima descriptio, 1654 apud [J.] Janssonio-Waesbergio; Moses Pit et Stephanus Swart Ingebonden” in: A. van Slichtenhorst, *XIV boeken van de Geldersse geschiedenissen* (Arnhem, 1653–1654).



**Emigrant Villages from J. Jansonius, Ducatus Geldriae (1654).**

up to the high grounds of the province of North Brabant. The plain continues north as far as Meppel via a narrow coastal strip on the coast of the former inland sea, the Zuyder Zee. This plain is quintessentially Dutch: a polder landscape ingrained in the minds of millions of people around the world, consisting of long, narrow, and sparsely populated stretches of grassland, grazing cattle, and dairy farms producing milk and cheeses such as the iconic Gouda or Leerdam. Windmills everywhere keep the reclaimed land dry after it sank and was then drained in the years following the “great land development.”

The city of Utrecht and the plain around it—the ancient Bishopric of Utrecht—was the urban heart of the northern Netherlands, called the Randstad (“the city of the Edge”), a center of economic power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century approximately 450,000 people lived here, compared with 460,000 in London. The ancient bishopric comprised the present-day province of Utrecht, large parts of Gelderland,<sup>7</sup> and portions of North and South Holland,<sup>8</sup> and, earlier, parts of the provinces of Overijssel and Drenthe. When leaving the current borders of the provinces out of the equation, a homogeneous group of farmers emerge—the farmers from the ancient bishopric of Utrecht and the Netherlands Plain.

Within these borders were sixty-one

villages from which New Netherland emigrants originated. Taking the average size of the villages into account it seems likely that most of the emigrants came from farming communities. As the table shows, the average size of the villages the emigrants came from varied between 436 to 500 inhabitants. The number of emigrants was relatively small.

In the three tables that follow the villages of origin are listed for two bordering regions. The first region is the central river delta of the large rivers between the rivers

**Total number of villages vs. villages where emigrants came from and their average size**

| Districts              | Nr | Nr | Avg |
|------------------------|----|----|-----|
| <b>The Islands</b>     |    |    |     |
| Bommelerwaard          | 20 | 4  | 235 |
| Tielerwaard            | 23 | 5  | 387 |
| Gorkum- & Arkelland    | 9  | 3  | 424 |
| Vianenland             | 7  | 4  | 499 |
| County of Culemborg    | -  | -  | -   |
| Stewardship of Beesd   | 1  | 2  | 450 |
| County of Buren        | 4  | 4  | 599 |
| Neder Betuwe           | 19 | 2  | 525 |
|                        | 85 | 24 | 436 |
| <b>Utrecht Plains</b>  |    |    |     |
| Lower Quarter          | 33 | 10 | 464 |
| Higher Quarter         | 18 | 12 | 437 |
| Gooyland               | 9  | 3  | 580 |
| Eemland                | 7  | 5  | 850 |
| Gelder Valley*         | 8  | 7  | 371 |
|                        | 75 | 37 | 499 |
| <b>Northern Plains</b> |    |    |     |
| Dingspel 2,3 Drenthe   |    | 6  | 378 |

Meuse, Waal, and Lek, as well as the Linge. The other area is the lowland west and east of the Utrecht Hill Ridge, the land of the Rhine and Lek, as well as the Eem River, bordering on the north the former inland sea. Next to the tables segments of the map made by J. Jansonius van Waesbergen in 1654 are included. The Islands is the first region: the rivers Meuse, Waal, Linge, and Lek are presented from left to right on the map. The red dots on the segment of the Jansonius map represent the places

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>7</sup> L.J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en de 17e eeuw*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam, 1945–1947), 220; including the former archidiaconate of Emmerik, politically not a part of the Netherlands.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 220: diploma *Ex injuncto* of 11 March 1561, with the exception of the Harlem region.

| Emigré villages in the Islands |     |                           |      |
|--------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|------|
| <b>1. Gorkum- en Arkelland</b> |     | <b>5. County of Buren</b> |      |
| Noordeloes                     | 560 | Buren                     | 900  |
| Schalluinen                    | 164 | Erichem                   | 300  |
| Schoonewoerd, Kortgericht      | 549 | Asch                      | 300  |
|                                |     | Buurmalen                 | 367  |
|                                |     | Tricht                    | 722  |
| <b>2. Vianenland</b>           |     | Beusichem                 | 1090 |
| Maerkerk                       | 741 | Zoelmond                  | 200  |
| Lakerveld                      | 276 |                           |      |
| Lexmond en Agthoven            | 667 |                           |      |
| Hei- en Boekloep               | 277 | <b>6. Tielerwaard</b>     |      |
|                                |     | Harvijnen                 | 1040 |
|                                |     | Tuill                     | 270  |
| <b>3. Stewardship of Beesd</b> |     | Meesteren                 | 260  |
| Beesd, Mariënwaard             | 720 | Geldermalsen              | 628  |
|                                |     | Opijnen                   | 350  |
|                                |     | Vank                      | 428  |
| <b>4. Bommelerwaard</b>        |     |                           |      |
| Bem                            | 260 | <b>7. Betuwe</b>          |      |
| Wel                            | 246 | Zoelen                    | 631  |
| Bruchem                        | 284 | Eck                       | 419  |
| Hunvenen                       | 280 | Oosterhout [bij Eist]     | 362  |
|                                |     | Wamel                     | n.a. |
|                                |     | Leeuwen                   | n.a. |



**Emigrant Villages on the Islands. J. Jansonius, Ducatus Geldriae (1654).**

| Emigré villages in the Utrecht Quarters, as well as Gooyland and Gelder Valley |                        |                                    |
|--|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Low Quart [Western Vecht]</b>  |                        | <b>3. Gooyland [Eastern Vecht]</b> |
| Polders Breukelen  |                        | Villages                           |
| Polders Maarssen   |                        |                                    |
| Villages   | Blankum                | 533                                |
| Waverveen  | Laren                  | 940                                |
| Vinkeveen  | Hilversum polders      |                                    |
| Vreeland   | Loenen, Stigt, Nisuis  | 583                                |
| Kortenhoef   | Loosdrecht             | 625                                |
| Tienhoven  |                        |                                    |
| Westbroek  | <b>4. Eemland</b>      |                                    |
| Kamerijk   | Hooiland, Breevoort    | 1449                               |
| Zegveld  | Bunschoten             | 779                                |
| Veldhuizen   | Leusden, Hamersveld    | 885                                |
| Harmelen, Bylevelt   | Soest                  | 1277                               |
|  | Stoutenburg en Asschat | 543                                |
| <b>2. High Quart Lek-Rhine</b>   |                        | <b>5. Gelder Valley</b>            |
| Villages   |                        | Villages                           |
| Wyck by Duurstede polders  |                        |                                    |
| Doorn  | 484                    | Borough of Nijkerk                 |
| Driebergen Rijssenburg   | 453                    | Bennekom <sup>10</sup>             |
| Werkhoven  | 389                    | Wekerom                            |
| Odyk   | 260                    | Borough of Putten                  |
| Bunnik en Vechten  | 398                    | Huizen                             |
| Schalikwyk   | 660                    | Hell, Rensselaer                   |
| Houten en't Goy  | 601                    | Borough of Barneveld               |
| Vreeswyk   | 648                    | Voorhuizen                         |
| Schouwen   | 140                    | Garderen                           |
| Jutphaas   | 860                    | Kootwykerbroek                     |
|  |                        |                                    |
| de Bilt and Oostbroek  | 1001                   |                                    |



*Emigrant Villages in Eem-Gooij and Gelder Valley, Ducatus Geldriae (1654).*

| Emigré villages in Drenthe  |      |
|-----------------------------|------|
| <b>2nd and 3rd Dingspel</b> |      |
| Borough of Meppel           | 3656 |
| Ruinerwold                  | 1009 |
| Ruinen                      | 680  |
| Hees                        | 20   |
| Dwingelo                    | 543  |
| Beilen                      | 473  |
| Halen                       | 108  |
|                             |      |
| Vicinity                    |      |
| City of Steenwijk           | 1781 |
| Peperqs Fr.                 |      |
| <b>North West Veluwe</b>    |      |
|                             |      |
| Suithem Ov.                 | 147  |
| Dalfsen                     | 773  |



*Emigrant Villages of the Northern Plains, Nederlanden VII province (1773).*

of origin of the farmer immigrants to New Netherland. From the top down we see the towns and villages from the map in the table by district numbered [1–8].

The second region shown is the area north of the Lek River and south of the inland sea—the core area of the bishopric of Utrecht. From the top down, we see the towns and villages from the map in the table by district numbered [1–5].

Further out in the Northern Plains, is the landscape of Drenthe, now the province of Drenthe the former jurisdictions consisted of six dingspels and four lordships.<sup>9</sup> People migrated to New Netherland from the second and the third dingspel. From

Beilingerdingspel (second), they came from the towns of Beilen and Halen. From Dieverderdingspel (third), people came from the towns of Meppel and Dwingeloo. From the lordship of Ruinen—a tract of land leased to the lords of Ruinen by the bishop of Utrecht—people came from the towns of Ruinen, Hees, and Ruinerwold.

**Circumstantial Triggers and Personal Motivations:** At first sight none of the recognized motives for emigration seem applicable, as there was no religious or intellectual restraint, no political unrest, and no social discontent.<sup>10</sup> “Quite the contrary.”<sup>11</sup> Even the Dutch East India

Company (VOC), the larger and more successful brother of the WIC, had difficulty in recruiting enough Dutch for its South African colony, thus, as for New Netherland, Huguenots and Germans were recruited. In the end the VOC attracted 317,000 crew on 1700 ships, a number of a much greater magnitude than the number of immigrants to New Netherland, where in the 1630s fewer than 1,000 people lived in the under-populated colony. Population in New Netherland only rose to an estimated 9,000 by 1664 as a consequence of the influx of families (70 percent of immigrants).

Seventeenth-century farmers in the Netherlands had a commercial and specialized approach. Working in a less feudal environment than found elsewhere in contemporary Europe, they divided their time between commercial activities. Out of the total number of 160 villages in the Netherlands Plain, New Netherland emigrants came from sixty-one small villages; villages with easy access to markets by waterways to sell crops in the towns, even those in the eastern provinces. Through the import of cheap grain, farmers specialized in intensive agriculture and grew such industrial crops as hemp or hops. Commercialization and specialization made Dutch agriculture highly profitable. The majority of farming households were not only cultivators, they divided their time between several commercial activities, such as dairying, peat digging, boat and wagon transport, reed gathering, freshwater fishing, fowling, sea-faring, spinning, dike and ditch labor, and a wide variety of household industries. This practice continued in the New World.

**The Atlantic Province’s Appeal:** How, then, did the promotion of New Netherland to these agricultural communities materialize? In its first stage, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) set rules and led in recruiting. The Company’s mission was to make “New Netherland the Granary of the Western Atlantic.” The first farms around New Amsterdam fed the town and produced flour for export. The first dominant immigrant group were single young men

<sup>9</sup> The term *dingspel* is derived from the German word *ding*, a governing assembly, and a session that was held three times a year until 1580 by the highest representative of the Bishop of Utrecht. *Ting* in the modern Scandinavian context still means a parliament.

<sup>10</sup> Originally published in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association 1931*, Volume I (Washington, D.C., 1932), 103–441.

<sup>11</sup> Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (London and Ithaca, N.Y., 2005), 33.

contracted by the WIC to set up farms or work as farm hands. Until 1649, trade was tightly regulated, without room to maneuver for smaller farmers. As a consequence, New Netherland during its first thirty or forty years was an unattractive prospect for agricultural settlers. Indeed, in the first years of the few farmers who did come, many returned to the fatherland.

A 1634 contract of Kees Theunis van Breukelen, from Westbroek, is an example.<sup>12</sup>

I . . . Cornelis Theunissen van Breuckelen, thirty years old, acknowledge by this my signature, that I have entered the service of Killian van Rensselaer, patroon of the Colony called Rensselaerswyck . . . for the period of three years commencing with my arrival there in the aforesaid colony to help . . . in carpentering, bricklaying, farming or such other work as I shall be ordered to do or be capable of doing, without distinction of work, and that I will not engage, without the consent . . . in any fur trade or obtain furs by gift or barter, upon forfeiture of all my goods or pain of peremptory correction touching my person or goods, and this for the sum of 180 guilders a year, . . . the aforesaid patroon shall procure passage for me in the ship which is being fitted out and pay my board at 6 stivers a day and besides making me a present of 25 guilders for my passage going and coming, which I acknowledge that I have received, without deduction from my wages, and if within the aforesaid period of three years, I quit his service without his express consent, he shall not be bound



*The Village of Well on the river Meuse, Bommelerwaard.*



to pay me a single penny of all that I have earned and I nevertheless be held to satisfy him for the remaining time. I also bind myself under all such regulations and instructions as my aforesaid patroon has already made or shall cause to be made hereafter or which shall be made in his name, to regulate myself accordingly, under penalties and punishment thereto attached, it being understood that over and above the 180 guilders, I shall have also free board, and in case the patroon or his agents should not be satisfied with my service, they shall be free to discharge me before the expiration of the aforesaid three years at any time they please. All this in good faith and in witness of the truth, I have signed this together with Jacob Dirscz Vogel, formerly baker, who offers himself as surety for the aforesaid Cornelis Theunissz, in Amsterdam, this fifth of April, sixteen hundred and thirty-four. [1634]

Also received from the hands of the aforesaid the sum of five guilders in order that I may equip myself the better with axes, adzes, trowels and other tools, which will not be deducted, from my wages. Done as above. 2 Reichsthaler at 50 stivers /f5. Signed Cornelis Thonissen.<sup>13</sup>

The Company did not promote permanent settlement by families, so a social network did not develop within the colony. The focus on the fur trade and the Company's tight control on agricultural produce in the first fifteen years did not favor private farming. Indeed, Company farming on Manhattan only ended in 1651, when Farm No. 1 was sold to Petrus Stuyvesant.

Few WIC plans for promoting settlement materialized. Contracted farmers left to pursue for the profitable fur trade. In 1636,

*Polder Mill, circa 1627, Hellow Tielerwaard, Lek and Linge District, Gelderland.*

Kiliaen van Rensselaer made an ultimate attempt and sent thirty-eight junior and senior farmers and craftsmen to his patroonship. These people were more successful than earlier settlers and they made agriculture a career. Most of them began as farm hands or assistant farmers and then became farmers in their own right in their second term of contract. Half of the settlers in this 1631 cohort were recruited from regions in the Netherlands Plain.

The States of Holland were unsatisfied with New Netherland's slow development and issued an ultimatum to the WIC to increase the population or they would take over. In 1640, the WIC launched two plans that gave colonists the right to trade freely and gave prospective colonists the incentive that if a household head emigrated with five additional people, they were entitled to 200 acres of land. Both of these incentives attracted immigrants and encouraged agriculture. Free land did so for the obvious reasons, but the liberalization of commerce allowed farmers to spread their interests. This corresponded to the way agriculture was conducted in the Netherlands; a farmer had his businesses on the side. Settlements that were established and developed after 1640, such as those in the Esopus and in northeastern New Jersey, were able to develop and grow.

Farms in the colony became widespread after 1654, when the Republic lost Brazil. The surge in immigration after 1657 also may reflect an all-out campaign by the WIC and the Dutch government to provide New Netherland with the number of people it had long needed.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> His full name was Cornelis Anthonisz van Slyck. [Broer Cornelis] from Westbroek/Maartensdijk, earliest magistrate of Rensselaerswijck with Brant Peelen, Gerrit de Reus, Pieter Cornelissen van Munickendam, and Dirck Janssen. Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, *History of New Netherland: Or, New York Under the Dutch*, 2 vols. (New York, 1855), 1: 322.

<sup>13</sup> Contract between Killiaen van Rensselaer and Cornelis Teunisz van Breuckelen, *Van Rensselaer Bowier manuscripts: being the letters of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, 1630-1643, and other documents relating to the colony of Rensselaerswyck*, A. J. F. van Laer, trans. and ed. (Albany, 1908), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver A. Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1986), 149.

Promotional propaganda, perhaps written at the Company's request, may have been effective in turning around the once-poor image of New Netherland.

In 1650, Cornelius van Tienhoven, Secretary of the New Netherland colony, published a pamphlet intended "to encourage families to migrate thither." There were descriptions of the land, crops, planting times, building plans, and so on.<sup>15</sup> Five years later, Adriaen van der Donck's *Description of the New Netherlands* (sic) was published. Van der Donck's work gave glowing descriptions of New Netherland—it was a paradise.

In *Anthology of New Netherland or translations of the early Dutch poets of New York*, Henry Murphy published in 1865 several poems written by poet Jacob Steendam in the 1650s. In his poem "Pride of New Netherland," Steendam calls New Netherland "thou noblest spot on earth." And in the poem "Spurring Verses," he writes "Choose you, New Netherland."<sup>16</sup> One anonymous pamphlet entitled *Short Account of New Netherland's Potential Virtues* created an idyllic Eden in the American forest, where democracy would rule supreme and all would accept every decision reached by "free living Christians."<sup>17</sup> So suited was this paradise to "Dutch industry and thrift" that only riches and happiness awaited those willing to emigrate.

This combination of incentives and motivations had an impact, for the colony boomed in the late 1650s and early 1660s. It is reasonable to assume that prospective emigrants knew about New Netherland, and probably of the opportunities directly from people who had gone to New Netherland before them.

In the 1660s, a certain normalcy in immigration developed. By that date the WIC realized that by giving "greater encouragement to agriculture" meant encouraging "the settlement of population." Agriculture and open trade stabilized this society with roots deep enough in the Hudson River Valley and in the valleys of northeastern New Jersey to survive the Dutch administration. The farming society that grew from then on proves that the Dutch efforts to establish a farming settlement led to success, upon which the Middle Colonies and a 100 years later the United States were able to build upon.

**Motivation:** Dutch Farmers must have heard the call of the WIC or the patrols by way of their recruiters, through middlemen



*Dike breakthrough between the Rhine and Lek River, 1724.*

like domines or from family and acquaintances, by reading pamphlets, or meeting each other in the marketplace or in the polders maintaining the dikes.

Would it be noticed if someone left? The population distribution for unmarried men in the age bracket of 17–25 years was approximately 0.6 percent of the total population at any given year in time.<sup>18</sup> For a village of 500 that is potentially three young men a year. Over a period of ten years émigrés potentially numbered thirty young men. If in any one year one out of three men emigrated about a third of the village's age group emigrated, the quantitative impact of the emigration of young men from villages in the 1700s would be notable. Villagers, especially young men, likely talked about motivation and opportunities of those who decided to leave.

**Closely knit network of the plain:** People, especially those living in the close-knit network of the Netherlands Plain, must have learned about the prospects in the overseas province. They were well connected economically, politically, and theologically, and certainly in their organized struggle against water. People knew each other well and intermarried. Such an example is Catalyntje Martense van Alstynne, who connected four regions of origin, including the Meppel region, through family marital ties.

Members of the villages cooperated in cultivating and draining the wetlands of the plain. The constant inflow of water from the high grounds of Europe made water management a form of survival, which led to an early form of democracy in the

defense against flooding and to structural communication between farmsteads along the waterways. Farmers needed to work together, especially in the regions where the vast majority of settlers came from.

**Reasons to Emigrate:** People from the plain heeded the call to emigrate for various reasons. An overall trigger may have been the economic downturn after the 1650s. In the émigré regions, specific triggers also may have had the upper hand, as in the Vecht, where the land became too wet to cultivate, or in the river delta, where the battle behind the dikes brought too many uncertainties. Serfdom, with its limited possibilities for personal initiative, may have been a specific motive for emigrating from the Gelder Valley, where tight control by German convents was evident.

The consequences of the Reformation and concentration of landownership stands out in Eemland, the Rhine-Lek, and the Meppel region. The revolt against Spain was a catalyst for the acceleration of the concentration of land leaseholds in the emigrant regions. The appearance of super

<sup>15</sup> Oscar McMurtrie Voorhees, *Historical handbook of the Van Voorhees family in the Netherlands and America* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1935), 14. Dr. H. P. Schaap, on p. 17

<sup>16</sup> Henry C. Murphy, *Anthology of New Netherland or translations of the early Dutch poets of New York, with the memoirs of their lives* (New York, 1865), the poems and memoirs of Jacob Steendam and Henricus Selyns, and the poet Nicasius de Sillè.

<sup>17</sup> Franciscus van den Enden, *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlands Gelegenheit, Deughden, Natuurlijke Voorrechten, en bij andere bequaembeidt* (Amsterdam, 1662), 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Bevolkingatlas van Nederland: Demografische ontwikkelingen 1850 tot heden*, 133. The population distribution of 1850 seems to be comparable with that of these earlier periods, also see note 4.

tenants lessened opportunities for small farmers to own land. Religious orders also had a pervasive presence in the rural communities of the seventeenth century. On the eve of the Reformation, the church's landownership was over 40 percent. Following the Reformation, these former church estates were transferred to cities or provinces. In the émigré regions, Norbertine abbeys in Beesd and Bern were two of the largest landowners. Benedictines owned abbeys in Utrecht and had a stronghold in the Ruinen region. In the Vecht region, Utrecht deaneries owned estates. Because cities were in a constant need of money, land rents were tendered, leading to arbitrary higher rents from one year to the next.

The emigrants or their parents may have suffered material loss from the consequences of the revolt against Habsburg Spain. Warfare was still present in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The rural population in the province of Utrecht remained overwhelmingly Roman Catholic on both sides of the river Lek and along the Vecht and Eem under the influence of local gentry.<sup>19</sup> This did not leave much room for the small farmers and craftsmen who joined the Reformation.

**Recruiters, Rich Uncles, and Chain Immigration:** Recruitment of farmers by local key figures or family already in the colony may have provided confidence. People seem to react to personal messages in letters or success stories told by New Netherland residents who came on return trips to the Fatherland. Quite a few farmhands did well and after their first contracts as a farmhand became farmers in their own right. The “rich uncle from America” story may already have attracted people in the seventeenth century, as is the case of Jan Jansz Damen.<sup>20</sup> He bequeathed a sum to the poor of Bunnik. Some charities established in the New Netherland had a long life; one established by the Albany Domine Dellijs is still functioning.<sup>21</sup> Pieter Bijlevelt and his



*Pieter Brueghel the Younger, “Payment of Tenth’s,” 1619.*

wife, two of the first emigrants, did a comparable thing in establishing a retirement home in 1664 in the Netherlands, which was not closed until as late as 1968.

Sometimes an insight into the character of a recruiter is given. The case of Kiliaen van Rensselaer, for example, suggests how Gerrit de Reus from the Rhine-Lek region may have lured people to come to the colony. “All these quarrels originated with Gerrit de Reus deceased, who made the people believe what-ever he saw fit.”<sup>22</sup> It seems that one of the strengths of Gerrit was being a smooth talker with a specialty in persuading people to come to the colony.

**Chain Emigrations and Networks:** Networks of family, friends, and acquaintances were of great importance to persuade emigration, leading to chain migrations. In the first period, recruitment by a representative of the WIC or the Van Rensselaers may have prevailed. The Van Rensselaers and their representatives recruited many of the settlers for the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck from around Utrecht, Amersfoort, and Nykerk.<sup>23</sup> Early representatives in-

cluded Wolfert Gerritsz van Couwenhoven, who married into the Van Rensselaer family, Gerrit de Reus, and Wouter van Twiller, son of Maria van Rensselaer, sister of Kiliaen.<sup>24</sup> Jan van Rensselaer, the second son of the first patroon, engaged a group of farmers in 1651.<sup>25</sup> From the region around Crailo in the Gooijland, where Kiliaen had his country estate, people came from the nearby towns of Hilversum, Blaricum, and Laren. Although Rijckart van Rensselaer, Kiliaen’s fifth son, was appointed treasurer of the city Vianen on the Lek River as late as 1681 by the Countess of Brederode, Rijckart may show ties to the region with towns of Schoonrewoerd and Beesd, where so many settlers came from. Another possibility is that Stuyvesant knew the region well, as his father died there at the Diefdijk in Overheykoop.<sup>26</sup> Representatives of the New Netherlands Company—the precursor to the WIC—may already have planted the seed of the thought to migrate to distant

<sup>19</sup> Rogier, *Geschiedenis katholicisme*, 410.

<sup>20</sup> The inventory of his personal property fills ten folio pages; he was co-owner of the privateer *La Garce*, HNN, 1:434–35.

<sup>21</sup> Ad van Bommel, *Het Dellijsfonds (1740–2012): Nalatenschap predikanten in Cothen, New York, Halsteren en Culemborg*, Historische Reeks Kromme Rijng gebied 13 (2012).

<sup>22</sup> *Van Rensselaer-Bowier Manuscripts*, 489.

<sup>23</sup> William J. Hoffman, “Random notes concerning settlers of Dutch descent,” *The American Genealogist*, *Whole Number 114* Vol. 29, No. 2 (April 1953), 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Nov. 1641 Not. J. van de Ven [from O’Callaghan, *History of New Netherland*, 1: 122.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffman, *Op Cit.*, 68–69.

<sup>26</sup> Ancestry.com links to this site, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rclarke/page1/stuyvesa.htm>.

*M. Brouertus, Sain  
Paul’s Abbey, Utrecht,  
St. Paul’s Abbey, a  
monastery in Utrecht, was  
the second oldest Roman  
Catholic monastery in the  
Netherlands.*



shores. An example of this is Lambert van Tweehuisen, whose family owned much land in one of the last developed bog lands in the polder Mastenbroek near Hasselt, fifteen miles from Meppel. In the period after 1640 well-known New Netherland family names like Lansing and Beekman appear from Hasselt, where Kiliaen was born and where his mother's family also originated.

Representatives of the WIC also may have personally been involved in recruiting colonists. Peperga in Friesland, the village where Petrus Stuyvesant was born, is close to Steenwijk and Meppel, locations where many others came to New Netherland. Is this geographical neighborhood a coincidence or did Stuyvesant induce people from his home turf to come to the New World, either actively or because people knew of this neighbor and his exploits?

Some recruiters created chain migrations. Wouter van Twiller, son of Kiliaen's sister, persuaded over fifty emigrants from his native region in the Gelder Valley to leave from the polders close to the former Zuyder Zee. This area lies in a radius of ten miles around the bogs of Huinen, close to the brookareas of Voorthuizen, Garderen, Kootwijk, Barneveld, Putten, and Nijkerk.

The father of Gerrit de Reus, Mattheus Hermansz, possibly ignites a Rhine-Lek chain as early as 1625. De Reus was one of the five architects of New Amsterdam in the service of the WIC. Gerrit recruited a considerable number of settlers from Houten.

**Personal Circumstances:** In the fewest cases, more personal circumstances emerge as a reason to leave for the colony. In the colony's early days, warfare and reformation still resonated in the community. Placards of the authorities ordering an end services and all forms of display of Roman Catholicism did not help.<sup>27</sup>

For example, in Eemnes in the Eem region, almost all inhabitants remained Roman Catholic, with only the farmhands joining the Reformed Dutch Church. This is illustrated in a letter of the mayoress to the provincial authorities. When urged to nominate a member of the Reformed church to become a magistrate, she wrote in response: "we should be apprehensive with the reason that disorders will follow if a day laborer is nominated to be the mayor, exercising authority over the wealthy farmers where he has to earn his bread in manual

labor."<sup>28</sup> In the Vecht region, Ankeveen remained Roman Catholic. The small Protestant congregation suffered harassment by the Catholic majority. During church services, the doors of an inn opposite the church stayed open with dancing and loud singing. Sometimes the church door was nailed shut or cows were allowed to graze on the church grounds.

While most of the farming families of the region remained Roman Catholic, family members who became Protestant found themselves at disadvantage, often cut off from family benefits and forced to seek fortunes elsewhere. The families of early settlers—Wolfert van Couwenhoven's brother in Hoogland, Gerrit de Reus, and Cornelis Aertsz van Schayck in Houten—resemble each other. These families lost a long-time lease. From the Rhine-Lek region, which stayed overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, a pattern emerges of disinherited siblings for religious reasons. The De Reus family lost heavily in the revolt before the turn of the seventeenth century. The Van Schayck family suffered financial reverses and lost the lease on their farmstead near Houten. Their cases resemble that of Wolfert van Couwenhoven, one of the first Protestants in Amersfoort. Wolfert called his farm "Achtervelt," referring to a Roman Catholic village near Amersfoort, perhaps for nostalgic reasons. The immediate reason for emigration however seems to be that his business as bleacher was not successful because of a downturn in the textile industry.

The Rhine-Lek region also shows a chain migration, though one that was a bit larger. In what he calls a "genealogical sociogram," Dr. Marcel S.F. Kemp connects all of the settlers from this region through family ties.<sup>29</sup> The chain was set in motion as

early as 1625 by Gerrit de Reus, one of the five original farmers of New Amsterdam in the service of the WIC. The De Reus family stems from 't Goy and owned a substantial estate in Rijsbrugge and Vechterbroek. The reason to emigrate may well have been that the family suffered from the eventful times during the revolt against Habsburg Spain and lost heavily before the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Gerrit de Reus came in the 1625 WIC convoy. In 1632, Kilian van Rensselaer contracted him to boost the farming business in the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck, for two reasons: De Reus was an experienced farmer having worked on one of the first WIC farms on Manhattan, and he was willing to sell his cattle to the patroon, which led to a political issue with the WIC. De Reus was to establish a farm on Blommaerts kill, on Laets Island [Laetsburg] near Albany.

In the year he was contracted, De Reus visited Utrecht as a representative of the van Rensselaer family. He returned to New Amsterdam on the ship the *Soutberg* in 1633 with four young farm laborers from the core area of origin of the seventeenth century settlers: Bunnik, Culemborg, Maartensdijk, and Meerkerk. Two of the recruits were working for him; one was his cousin.<sup>31</sup> Four years later, in 1637, he again visited the region and recruited

<sup>27</sup> Hoffman, 179.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>29</sup> M. S. F. Kemp, "Krommerijners in de nieuwe wereld. Een onderzoek naar de achtergrond en onderlinge verwantschap van vroege kolonisten in Nieuw Nederland afkomstig uit het Utrechtse Krommerijng gebied," *Nederlandsche Leeuw* CIX (October-November 1992), 10-11: 414.

<sup>30</sup> A. J. F. van Laer, *Settlers of Rensselaerswyck 1630-1658* 7,10 e.o. re: Bunnik, Houten, Vechten, 't Goy

<sup>31</sup> Jan, alias Frederick van Schayck, married to Geertruyt de Reus, was a brother of Aert Jansz's father and a great uncle of Gerrit de Reus. See Kemp, note 30



Flood area Lek River marked in green, 1747.



*Early seventeenth-century manor farm in the Hell polder.*

Crijn Cornelisz and his brother Roelof from Houten in the Rensselaerwijck mission. Crijn began work as a farmhand on a farm in Greenbush [*Greenen Bos*] on the Rensselaerwijck estate. Following De Reus's death, Crijn took over the farm as farmer with a partner. Three years later, in 1640, he returned to Utrecht as a recruiter himself, to sail with five lads from Houten on de Waterhondt. This trip seems to conclude the chain of emigration, although a cousin of the wealthy Jan Jansz Damen from Bunnik migrated to New Netherland in 1650. The Van Schayck family—related to the van Reus family—suffered financial reverses and lost their lease on their Overdam farmstead near Houten in about 1600, after eighteen years of occupancy. Cornelis Aertsen van Schayck, who came to Houten, via Westbroek, was Protestant. Most of his father's siblings remained Roman Catholic. Kemp cites one clear-cut case of a brother disinheriting his siblings for religious reasons and suggests that religion may be the reason why Aert left the family circle at Houten and why Cornelis Aertsen never used the family name Van Schayck.

Religion may have cost some farmers the renewals of their leases on lands taken over by the Reformed church, but other factors were at work. Cornelis settled across the Hudson from New Amsterdam in Pavonia.<sup>32</sup> In 1649, he is named by Jan Jansz Damen of Bunnik to administer his estate. Cornelis's family had close ties with the family of Jan Aertsen van der Bilt.

*Hell, Huinen, and other places.* Wouter van Twiller, who also came on the *Soutberg* in 1636 with Gerrit de Reus, ran his farms by hiring tenants from his native region in the Gelder valley and the polders close to the former Zuyder Zee, where the Rensselaer family had a homestead close to the hamlet of Hell between Nijkerk and Putten. The Van Twillers and the Van Curlers were related. People were contracted in a ten-

mile radius around the boglands of Huinen, from Barneveld, Putten, Nykerk, and the landscaped brook areas of Voorthuizen, Garderen, and Kootwijk. Albert Terhune and over fifty other less well-known emigrants came from this area as well.

In a 1641 contract a reason for hiring from this region is mentioned—it is stated that the two contracted farm hands had “to sow, mow, plough,” in the Gelderland manner.<sup>33</sup> Cosyn Gerritsen, a wheelwright from Hell, came to New Netherland. Why did he migrate to New Netherland?<sup>34</sup> Historian Firth Haring Fabend's theory is that Wouter van Twiller, his exact contemporary from Hell, encouraged him to.<sup>35</sup> Wouter had his farm close to the location of Cosyn's *bouwerie* according to the 1639 *Manatus Map*. Wouter, planning to grow tobacco on his large property, would have needed a wheelwright to make his farm implements and keep them in repair.

In 1651, Jan van Rensselaer, second son of the first patroon, engaged a group of twelve farmers who were natives of this area.<sup>36</sup> They sailed in the *Gelderse Blom* and came from Amersfoort, Bunschoten, Nijkerk, Horst, Wekerom, and Veldhuyzen en de Bilt near Utrecht.

Networks of family and friends were of great importance in the seventeenth century, and most people expected to and did reap benefit from them.<sup>37</sup>

**Later Chains and Networks:** Private individuals did not repeat the WIC's mistake of concentrating on one activity to the exclusion of all others. The end of WIC's policy of restriction and monopoly contributed to agriculture becoming the colony's core activity. The new immigrants came to New Netherland because of the general economic liberalization rather than the particular freedom to engage in the fur trade. “The economic pattern in New Netherland, which these immigrants helped to establish, was basically agricultural, with the Indian trade in most areas a common but relatively minor side line.”<sup>38</sup>

In Wageningen in the Gelder Valley, Gerrit Gerritsen (b. in 1630) and his wife, Anna Hermansse, booked passage on the ship *Faith* to New Netherland in December 1660.<sup>39</sup> Wageningen formerly was part of the Bishopric of Utrecht; it lies in the polder

on the Rhine River. As the name suggests it is a place where wagons can be transported to the other side of the river. Today Wageningen is famous for its Agricultural University. Gerrit and Anna took two neighbors to the city council, on November 17, 1660, to testify to their good character. The testimony was taken down and attested to by a “private seal” of the city. What makes the certificate interesting is that it reveals the motivation of the couple to make the big step of emigrating to New Netherland, “to find greater convenience.”

The Certificate of Character granted Gerrit and his wife reads:

We, burgomasters, aldermen, and councilors of the city of Wageningen, declare by these present, that appeared before us Hendrick Ellisen and Jordiz Spiers, citizens of this city, at the request of Gerrit Gerritsen and Annetjie Hermansse, his wife.

They have testified and certified as they do by these present, that they have good knowledge of the above named Gerrit Gerritsen and Annetje Hermansse, his wife, as to their life and conversation, and that they have always been considered and esteemed as pious and honest people, and that no complaint of any evil or disorderly conduct has ever reached their ears; on the contrary, they have always led quiet pious and honest lives, as it becomes pious and honest persons.

<sup>32</sup> Cornelis Aertsen Van Schaick, *A Biography and his Forbearers*; svanschaick.tripod.com

<sup>33</sup> Amsterdam Notarial Archives, 1332, 45, and: Amsterdam Notarial Archives, May 13, 1646, 1060, 89, 89v.

<sup>34</sup> Firth Haring Fabend, “Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten: New Amsterdam's Wheelwright” *de Halve Maen* 80 (Summer 2007), 2:23–30.

<sup>35</sup> Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 78, and David William Voorhees, “Van Twiller, Wouter,” *American National Biography*, 252–53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69.

<sup>37</sup> References to Van Twiller's land in Phelps-Stokes, *Icography*, are in vol. 6, pp. 104, 114, 129, 157, 161–162, 164, 187, 190–191. In addition to this farm, he acquired over his short stay in NA 4 islands (Roosevelt, Wards, Randalls, and Governors), as well as land on Long Island and on the upper east side of Manhattan. Phelps-Stokes describes *Bouwerie No. 10* as of 250 acres. The deed says it was 200 acres. See Jaap Jacobs, “A Troubled Man: Director Wouter van Twiller and the Affairs of New Netherland in 1635,” *New York History* (Summer 2004), 213–32.

<sup>38</sup> Allen Trelease, *W. Indian Affairs in Colonial New York* (Ithaca, NY, 1960), 62.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen L. Nebeker, comp., *Our Dutchandfancestors in America van Wagnders and van Houtens 6, 7 and others, like: Van Wagenen & Van Wagoner of Bergen Country, New Jersey—CA 1660* (Compiled by Carl S. Van Wagenen, Saugerties NY 12477); William Nelson, *Historical sketch of the county of Passaic, New Jersey. especially of the first settlements and settlers* (Paterson, NJ, 1877).



They especially testify that they govern their family well and bring up their children in the fear of God and in all modesty and respectability.

As the above-named persons, have resolved to remove and proceed to New Netherland, in order to find greater convenience, they give this attestation, grounded on their knowledge of them, having known them intimately, and having been in continual intercourse with them for many years, living in the same neighborhood.

In testimony of the truth, we the burgomasters of the city have caused the private seal of the city to be hereto affixed.<sup>40</sup>

Upon landing at New Amsterdam, on December 23, 1660, Gerrit and Annetjie moved to the west side of the Hudson River and settled at Communipaw, in the town of Bergen, present-day New Jersey. On October 16, 1662, WIC Director General Petrus Stuyvesant appointed Gerrit one of three schepenen (aldermen) for Bergen. In the same year Gerrit was one of the petitioners for the call of a Reformed minister at Bergen, pledging to contribute six florins a year for his support. It seems that the couple came well prepared. They were welcomed by the Bergen community and were supporters of the first Dutch Reformed congregation. Gerrit and Annetjie were one of the first to settle in Bergen. In the period following the surrender to the English in 1664, a great many farmers followed them from the Hudson Valley and Long Island.

In Beesd, opposite the Rhine-Lek region, “The spirit of emigration made many people in Beesd pack up and leave for New Netherland, in which they had a safe precedent in no less a person than the village pedagogue—much revered was he and looked up to in those days—good Master Gideon Schaets.” And so with, “every bit of news that wafted home from time to time in friendly letters served to quicken interest in the new country, they yielded to the flattering offers held out by the colonists, and agreed to leave for that distant land.”<sup>41</sup>

Gideon Schaets was schoolteacher in Beesd and a member of the Beesd Reformed Church until his appointment as minister of the Albany Reformed Church in 1652. *De Bever* left for New Amsterdam on May 9, 1661, with a larger group from Beesd.<sup>42</sup>

A letter by WIC Directors to Stuyvesant gives details of the group of colonists from *Spring 2017*

## Beesd

With these ships go over a reasonable number of colonists and other passengers, and among these many good farmers who will be especially useful there, is found one Huijgh Barents de Kleijn of Beesd in Gelderland, baker, grocer and farmer who, by his enthusiasm, has brought from there about 36 souls with the expectation that more shall follow. We think it right not only to recommend Your Honors to accommodate and help all of them as much as possible, but would also like to see that Your Honors, when a suitable occasion arises, benefit the afore said Huijgh Barents de Kleijn in some way or another, preferably at no cost to the Company, in order that he and his companions will write a favorable report so that more of their fellow-countrymen in Gelderland will travel there.<sup>43</sup>

The group includes six families, that of Huijgh with seven children, of Pieter Marselis with four children and two servants, of Aert Pietersen Buys with one child, of Frans Jacobsen with two children, and widow Geertje Cornelis with six children, and widow Adriaentje Cornelis and a daughter. As well as Hendrick Bries and Goosen Jansen Van Noort (shoemakers), Neeltjen Jans and Geertruyt Theunissen (son Gijbert Cornelis, Albany 1667, woodworker and builder in Kinderhook; Geertje daughter married Juriaen Calyer of Kinderhook.<sup>44</sup>

From the same region, the brothers Jan and Michiel Bastiaensen, sons of Sebastian van Kortryk (Kortright family), left for the colony in April 1663. Jan lived in Beesd at the time and Giel lived a bit down the Linge in where the Kortgerecht polder lies. Kortgerecht is a neighborhood of Schoonwoerd west of the Diefdike—a dangerous place to live, where Waal and Lek rivers

merged flooded five times in the 1500s. The brothers and their young families sailed on the ship *Bontekoe*. Upon their arrival, they first went to Stuyvesant’s Bowery, though soon after they went to Harlem. Jan was the “Kortryck” who owned a Bouwery on Staten Island in 1674.<sup>45</sup> His children, Hendrick and Belitie, moved to the Esopus. Michiel lived several years at Harlem and with his son-in-law, Hendrick Kierson, hired farms to the north of Harlem. In 1673, he was elected a magistrate at Fordham, and was on the roll of the Night Watch at Harlem, as well as being identified with the Dutch church there.

From the northern region of Meppel another chain migration began in 1652. This region has all the hallmarks of a bog land, like in the central Netherlands Plain, and is an area that to this day evokes images of how the Netherlands must have looked when the Romans saw it. Two of the most iconic towns in the Netherlands, just south of Meppel and Steenwijk, are Giethoorn, the Venice of the north, and Staphorst.

There were other similarities with the central Netherlands Plain in the 1600s, such as the strong imprint of the Roman Catholic Church as a landowner and a rent collector. The Benedictines had a strong stronghold here, with the double convent of Saint Mary at Dickninge, a continuation of the convent of Ruinen. It is from Ruinen that the chain

<sup>40</sup> Done at Wageningen, 27 Nov. 1660 by the ordinance of the same, J. Aqueline. Frank A. Van Wagenen, *History of the Van Wagoner-Van Wagenen Family*,

<sup>41</sup> John Howard Abbott, *The Courtright (Kortright; Kortgerecht) Family Descendants of Bastian van Kortryk, A Native of Belgium who Emigrated to Holland about 1615* (New York 1922), 14–15.

<sup>42</sup> *List of Passengers, 1654 to 1664 from New York Colonial Mss. Vol. 14*, 83–123.

<sup>43</sup> Letters by WIC Directors from Amsterdam to Peter Stuyvesant, 9 May 1661. (NYCM 14: 20, lines 55–61); “the van der Hoof project.”

<sup>44</sup> ESB 2:16 and various references in ERA, CMA).

<sup>45</sup> NYCM 23: 403

### *Hofstede overdam het gebouw*



immigration started.

Between four regions of origin of the early settlers—the Meppel region, the Rhine and Lek region, the Gooij and Eemland region, and the Delta region—exists a remarkable and early link. The link is Catalyntje Martense van Alstyne born in Houten in 1616, daughter of Marten Van Alstyne born in Houten in 1585. Marten moves [back] to Meppel judging by the fact that two of his children are born in Meppel.<sup>46</sup> In 1635 Catalyntje married Cornelis Maasen van Buren from Buurmalsen. Another link between north and is the marriage on May 16, 1673, of Hendrick Kiersen [b. 1650] from in Gees, Drenthe, to Metje Michiels Kortright [1655] daughter of Giel Bastiaensen from Schoonrewoerd.<sup>47</sup>

The villages where settlers for the New World came from lie in an almost a straight line from the southwest and the northeast that links Meppel, Ruinen [Hees en Ruinerwold], Dwingeloo, Bijlen, Zwiggelte, and Westerveld. Around 1652, Jan Stryker and Pieter Lott from Ruinen and Ruinerwold set this chain in motion. In 1658, Jan Roelofszon Seuberige followed—both Jans are related to Steven Coerts van Voorhees who sailed in 1660 along with many others. As in 1662 and 1663, when two large groups migrated, many young families emigrated from the Meppel region, like Lubbert Lubbertse van Westervelt with his wife and four children.

Regularly a domine may perform a role as a guidesman or as an inspiration to go to the colony, creating a regional network. In the case of the Meppel region, Dominie Theodorus Polhelmus, who preached in Gieten and in Meppel, before leaving for New Netherland in 1634 after doctrinal differences, may have performed such a role. Steven Coerts probably rented a farm in the Meppel area during at least part of Dominie Polhemius' preaching tenure in that city.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Steven could have listened

to him. He probably remembered him many years later when he heard that his former pastor was now in New Netherland serving the Midwout community on Long Island where brother-in-law Jan Strycker was an important figure—and so, another personal attraction to New Netherland existed.

In 1598, the new protestant leaders secularized the property of the former orders, though compared to the other provinces it was quite late.<sup>49</sup> The rent continued to be paid to Dikninge. The new administrators exacted high rents and were not overly prompt with building repairs. A local historian asks the question whether “this playing around with rent conditions and the knowledge that someone else who needed land could “unrent” land and house against a higher compensation was a motive to leave.” He concludes that it is not improbable; in any case, at an advanced age, he left for a new existence in a foreign land.<sup>50</sup>

Steven's brother, Albert—the oldest of the three sons of Coert—assumed the land lease for Voor Hees around the time of secularization and occasionally experienced difficulties with paying the rent.

“Time and again Albert requested the governing body of Drenthe for reduction of rent: he did so in 1635, 1645, 1647, 1653, 1654, and 1659. The request of 1659—a year before Steven's emigration—sent by the steward of Dikninge on Albert's behalf to Drost and Deputies of Drenthe, shows us the bad state of affairs at Voorhees. Speaking of the farm, the request states that “his house, barn and sheepfold need urgent repairs, before it falls totally into decay.”<sup>51</sup>

The situation in Drenthe was comparable to the situation in the other regions that were still recovering from the effects of the troubles. The economy suffered during the period of conflict. Many farms laid in waste for years (about 33 percent in 1600).<sup>52</sup> The religious turmoil had a further important impact. Only from 1627 on did

the situation improve little by little, until after 1630 Drenthe became completely safe again. From around 1625 to 1650 the economy grew, although 1650 marked the beginning of a long depression that lasted until 1750. As a consequence, earnings declined, production costs increased, and the tax burden grew for the first time since the introduction of land taxes of 1643.<sup>53</sup>

A few large owners controlled arable land in seventeenth-century Drenthe, so there was little opportunity for small farmers to own land. The leaseholder was subject to the economic decisions of landlords. A farmer would not be able to own a farm and would probably be limited to renting small farms.

Because of this, Coerts probably shared a motivation common to most immigrants to the New World, namely creating better opportunity for him and his family. Upon landing at New Amsterdam, on April 15, 1660, Steven Coerts settled in Amersfoort, the village founded by Wolfert Gerritsen van Couwenhoven. His arrival resembled that of Gerrit Gerritsen from Wageningen eight months later. He brought money and in November he purchased land with a house a brewery in Amersfoort. He and his wife became members of the Dutch Reformed Church in Vlacke Bos [Flatbush]. In 1664 he was appointed Magistrate.

**Conclusion:** The Netherlands Plain emigrant opened an invitation for further exploration in terms of networks and relationships between the early settlers in the Netherlands and later in the Middle Colonies, and their contribution to the agricultural history of the United States. Landownership of Roman Catholic farmers and of the legal successors of Roman Catholic Institutions may have had a profound effect on the motivation to emigrate.

<sup>46</sup> Jannetje, born in 1614, and Jan born in 1623.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel S. Purple, ed., *Records of the RDC in New Amsterdam and New York; Marriages from 1639 to 1801* (New York, 1890; rpt. 1997)

<sup>48</sup> D. J. Wijmer, “Steven Coerts His Family and is Dutch Background,” *Through a Dutch Door* (Van Voorhees Association, 1992), 28.

<sup>49</sup> Van Voorhees Historical Handbook, 14. H. P. Schaap suggested that secularization in Drenthe occurred after 1603, *Through a Dutch Door*, 148.

<sup>50</sup> J. Poortman, “Steven, een Drents landverhuizer uit 1660,” *Nieuwe Drentsche Volksalmanak* 1943

<sup>51</sup> J. Folkerts, “Drenthe and New Netherland Two Outer Provinces at the Time of Emigration,” *Through a Dutch Door*, 109.

<sup>52</sup> Wijmer, “Steven Coerts His Family and His Dutch Background,” *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*



*1650 Farm in Hei en Boeicop near Schoonrewoerd.*