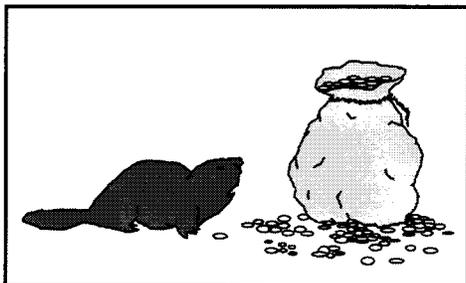


EARLY DUTCH COLONIZATION: How Farmers Took Over New York

In 1609, Captain Henry Hudson sailed over 3,000 miles to find India — or at least a good route to the place. Instead, he found the place that is now called New York State. Henry was an Englishman, but he worked for the Dutch in **The Netherlands**. (Part of the Netherlands is called Holland.) The Dutch claimed that they owned New York, and proudly dubbed it **Nieuw Nederland** (*New Netherland*). This marked the beginning of New York State as we know it. It also marked the beginning of European-style farming or **agriculture** in New York's forest-covered valleys and plains. The Dutch government and Dutch farmers both changed New York — almost completely. However, if you look at the countryside, Dutch farmers did it first.



Almost right away, Dutch people started to move here. At first what they wanted was to set up trade with the Native Americans. The natives knew how to trap the many wild animals like beaver that lived in the forests and streams, and these furs were



quite valuable back in Europe. The Dutch also had things that the natives wanted, such as metal pots and tools, and wonderful kinds of cloth. Muskets too, though the Dutch weren't so keen on giving out many of these!

Wherever Europeans go they set up towns, like **Nieuw Amsterdam** (New York City) pictured here. And the Dutch needed farms to feed the people in them. Soon they cut down many of the forests that the natives used for hunting. When you think of it, the Native Americans were very tolerant of the newcomers, since attacks and fighting were fairly rare (at first) — even though the natives were losing more and more hunting grounds. Native Americans had to keep moving farther and farther from the newly named Hudson River, just to keep Dutch farmers from plowing up their backyards.

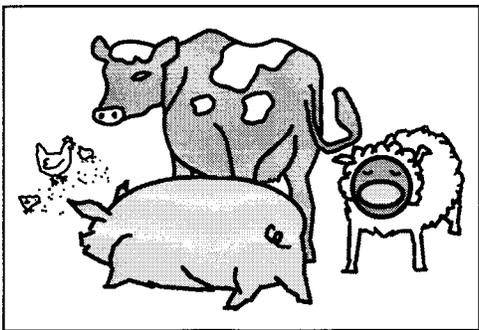
This tolerance didn't last. A man named Willem Kieft, who was the head of Nieuw Amsterdam, ordered the massacre of a native settlement, because natives had attacked a Dutch farm. Things got even worse when the Dutch tried to make the natives pay taxes. (When the English tried the same trick a hundred years later, Americans declared independence!) Life never completely settled down after that. In fact, though most people don't think of it, New York State was sort of the first Wild West. New York City, Kingston, Albany, and Schenectady were certainly forts on the wild frontier.

It's not that the Native Americans didn't like farming. In fact, they were experts. But their farming was different. Over thousands of years they perfected an ingenious

technique for growing corn, beans, and squash all together. They called them **the 3 sisters**. Still, they spent much of the year living off wild plants and animals, while the 3 sisters ripened in small fields near their houses.



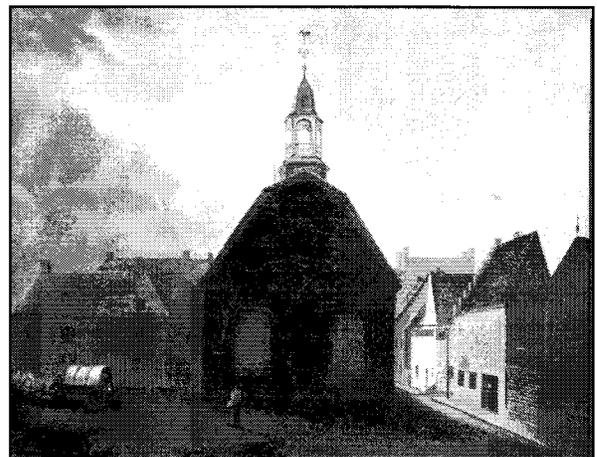
The natives often had towns, too, though in New York State these were fairly small. They were ruled not by mayors or kings but by **consensus**. This was particularly true of the **Iroquois**, who dominated the region. For them, all men of a certain age had to agree or no decision was made. The Europeans found this really frustrating. Still, the leaders of the councils were the ones responsible for saying who lived where. Individual people did not own land — the whole tribes did. If you were a Native American, you could only claim land that the tribe gave to you, and only temporarily.

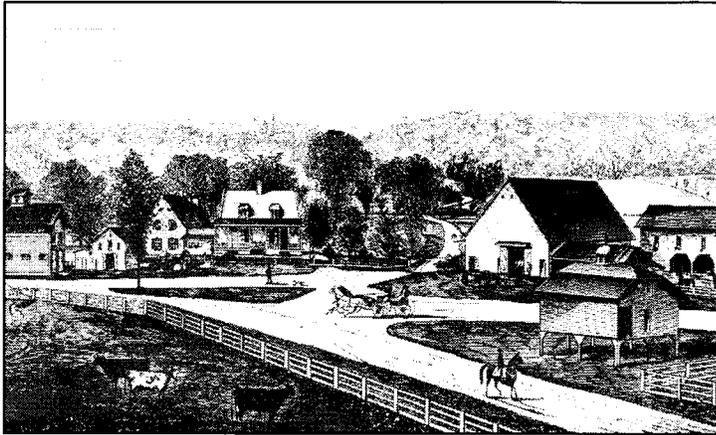


Unfortunately for the natives, the Dutch had very different ways of doing things. Firstly, the Dutch relied almost entirely on plants and animals that they raised themselves — what we call **domesticates**. Wheat and barley were among their most important foods, and these plants needed larger fields and much more attention than the native corn and beans. The Dutch also needed a lot of land for

their cattle, sheep and pigs; in fact, domestic animals need much more land than even wheat and barley.

Secondly, Europeans did not rule by consensus. The Netherlands was possibly the most democratic nation in Europe at the time, but the Dutch people who worked the land were *not* created equal to the people who owned it. And, according to the Dutch (and English and French and Spanish), it wasn't the Native Americans who owned the land of America — it was the European governments.

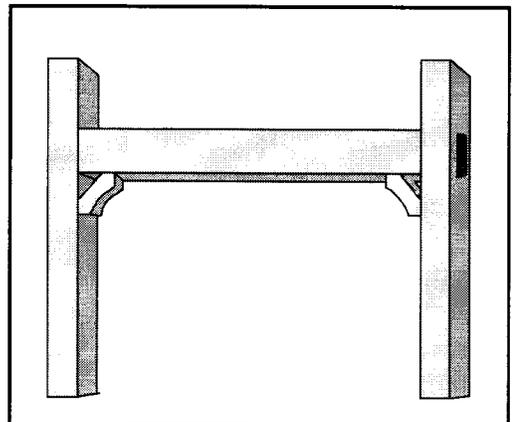




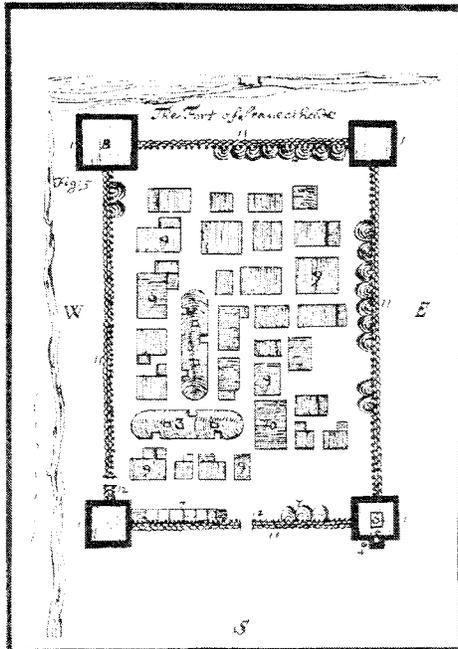
Here's where the differences between the European and native systems really cheated the natives. You see, the natives agreed to let the Dutch and other Europeans *use* their land, while the Europeans thought they had *bought* it. That meant the Europeans could change it or sell it or do whatever they liked with it.

Government ownership was bad for the Native Americans, but it was almost as bad for the European farmers, at least at first. The Dutch government sold much of the land to the Dutch West India Company, and the rest to wealthy businessmen. This company and these businessmen were absolute masters here, and anyone living on their lands were simply employees — or slaves. They didn't have the rights of modern employees, because their employers made the laws and, if you took them to court, the judges were their employers! The Dutch called this **the patroon system** when it involved businessmen, and the businessman was called the **patroon**. Actually, the only person who became a major patroon in New York State was **Kiliaen van Rensselaer**. He owned what we call the Capital Region.

Thanks to the patroon system, the first European farmers of New York State were usually poor. We can see this in the buildings they erected. The farmers built very large barns, because food was the most important thing in life, and these barns helped food production in many ways. On the other hand, the farmers were tenants and didn't know how long they could live here, so they built very *small* houses. Both barns and houses were made of frames shaped like a giant H.



These **H-frames** used large beams of wood because of all the big trees around. And the Europeans loved using big trees, because they didn't have any in their home countries, where the countryside was covered with farms, and trees were few and small.

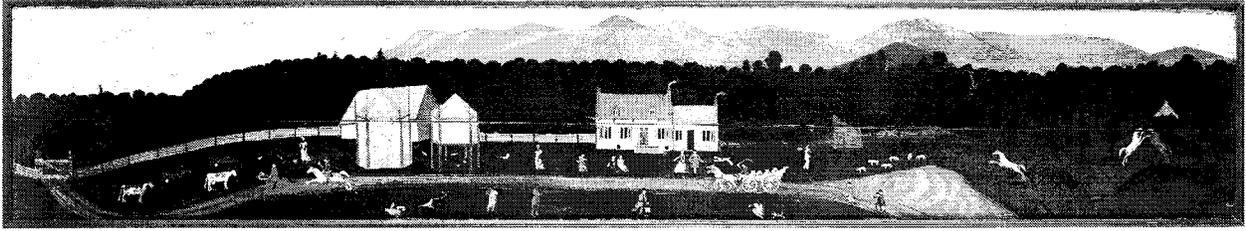


Not all farmers were poor. In fact, around the Dutch towns, the farms were often owned by the people *in* the towns. There isn't much land for farming in a town — even a town on the frontier. So people in early towns like Schenectady had their nice houses in the town, and their farms outside of town where there was all the land they could want. Mr. Jan Mabee had a nice house on Church Street inside the Schenectady **stockade** or fort (shown here in the sketch from the 1690s), but he also had a one-room house 2 miles away, and a large farm around it (see photo below). Mabee and other Schenectadians could feed themselves with the food from their farms, but live inside the fort.

In 1664 the English took over Nieuw Nederland and renamed it New York. Still, Dutch pioneers like Jan Mabee never left. In fact, we can still visit Jan's homestead. And many of the New Yorkers around you are descended from the Dutch who settled the tree-covered frontier of New York. However, people aren't the only descendants of European pioneers. The trees and flowers and bushes and weeds that the Dutch brought from Europe have truly taken over the landscape of New York. For better or for worse, every corner of the state has been changed by European governments, cultures, animals, or plants. It all began with Henry Hudson and the people he introduced to New York.

But the Dutch farmers did the dirty work.





Some Things to Think About:

1. Why did Dutch farmers come to America?
2. If you were a Dutch farmer, would *you* have come to America?
3. What did the Dutch farmers find here?
4. What are some of the differences between Dutch and Native American farming?
5. What are the differences between Nieuw Amsterdam and New York City?
6. What made the natives so angry at the Dutch?
7. Do you think they had a right to be angry?
8. Do you think the Dutch had a right to settle here?
9. What's an H-frame?
10. What's a patroon system?
11. How does a patroon system differ from the type of government the natives had in New York State?
12. What was the first name of New York State?
13. What was the first name of New York City?
14. How did the Dutch change the landscape of New York?

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