

De Nieuw Nederlanse Mercurius



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Events of interest

February 15–May 15, 2011. The Frick Collection of NYC presents, “Rembrandt and his School: Masterworks from the Frick and Lugt Collections.” When Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919) was asked whose talents he would most like to possess, he declared: “Rembrandt’s.” And as the largest individual railway stockholder in the world, Frick is reported to have said that “railways are the Rembrandts of investment.” Like Frick, the Dutch art historian Frederik Johannes Lugt (1884–1970) was a great admirer and collector of works by the Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669); as a teenager he wrote a biography of the artist, illustrated with his own copies after Rembrandt’s most famous works. In 2011 the Frick will present a selection of Rembrandt’s works as seen through the eyes of these two renowned collectors, devoting three exhibition spaces to the work of this artist and his school. For further information and a preview of the exhibit, go to: www.frick.org.

Until May 22, 2011. The Berkshire Museum of Pittsfield, Massachusetts presents, “M.C. Escher: Seeing the Unseen.” This world premiere exhibition provides a full-on experience, including an up-close look at several rarely-displayed works, original woodblocks, watercolors, preparatory drawings and hard-to-find prints of many of Escher’s iconic images. Hands-on interactive stations provide the chance to find the fun in Escher’s technique through personal exploration. This eye-opening experience also takes a look at Escher’s impact on popular culture, from the cover of *The New Yorker* to black-light posters, and even some very creative tattoos. The exhibit provides fresh and vital insight into one of the 20th century’s most popular artists, revealing the inspiration Escher (the pride of Leeuwarden) took from the natural world—be it the forms of fish, birds and reptiles; the tightly interlocking figures known as tessellations; or the mathematical concepts that allowed him to unlock his distinctive style.

Alongside Escher a collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings from the 16th–17th centuries will run from April 2–May 8. They have been culled from the Berkshire Museum’s

collection. Artists include Adriaen Isenbrandt, Jan Victors, Pieter de Hooch and Joachim Beuckelaer. The artwork features genre scenes of everyday life, portraits, and religious themes. For further information, go to:

www.berkshireremuseum.org.

February 26–June 19, 2011. The Peabody Essex Museum of Salem, Massachusetts presents, “Golden: Dutch and Flemish Masterworks from the Rose–Marie and Eijk van Otterloo Collection.” Nearly seventy paintings from the internationally acclaimed collection of Eijk and Rose-Marie van Otterloo illuminate one of the greatest artistic and cultural chapters in history. The Van Otterloo collection is virtually unrivaled for its masterworks by the leading Dutch and Flemish artists of the 1600s: Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Aelbert Cuyp and many others. At PEM, over 20 examples of 17th-century Dutch and Flemish furniture and decorative arts, also from the Van Otterloo collection, are shown in the company of these glorious portraits, still lifes, landscapes and interiors. For further information, go to: www.pem.org.

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After leaving PEM the Otterloo exhibit will be at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA from July 9–Oct. 2 and at the Museum of Fine Arts of Houston, TX from Nov.13–Feb.12, 2012

Save the Date

The New Netherland Seminar will take place this year in New Castle, Delaware from 15–17 September. The focus will be on various historical aspects of the South River region of the Dutch colony. The full program will appear in the June issue of the Marcurius.

Publications

A Beautiful and Fruitful Place: Selected Rensselaerswijck Papers, vol. 2 Featuring New Netherland's distinctive regional history as well as the colony's many relationships with Europe and the 17th-century Atlantic world, these cogent and informative papers are an indispensable source toward a better understanding of New Netherland life and legacy. (SUNY Press, May 2011). To order, go to: bit.ly/iksKkK

The New York State Capitol and the Great Fire of 1911 by Paul Mercer and Vicki Weiss. In the early morning hours of March 29, 1911, a fire broke out in the New York State Capitol at Albany. By sunset, the entire western portion of the building had sustained extensive structural damage. Within lay the entire collection of the New York State Library, almost completely

reduced to ashes. In a particularly bitter irony, the fire struck as the overcrowded library was four months away from moving into new, spacious quarters under construction across the street. *The New York State Capitol and the Great Fire of 1911* includes recently discovered photographs documenting the construction of the building, beginning in 1867, as well as eyewitness accounts of its destruction. For the centennial of the fire, coauthors Mercer and Weiss, of the New York State Library, have culled rare images and documents from the special collections of the modern library, which arose from the ashes of the 1911 fire. The \$22.00 price includes tax, S & H. Available from the Friends of the State Library online store at: bit.ly/fTw5kS or via US mail by check payable to Treasurer, Friends of the New York State Library, P O box 2247, Empire State Plaza Station, Albany, NY 12220

Out of print for many years and inaccessible to researchers, the first volume of the *Register of the Provincial Secretary 1638–41* is now available on the web. This volume consists of wills, inventories of estates, depositions, and other documents. Although all the Dutch records suffered varying degrees of damage in the 1911 fire, only volume one of the colonial Dutch records was completely destroyed. All that remains of its Dutch original is a transcription of documents 95–143, which Van Laer happened to have at his house.

Future volumes in this series will consist of a scan of the original document, a transcription of the Dutch, and a translation with annotations. To browse or download volume one of the "Register," go to: bit.ly/gnmPIZ.

The Sugar Connection: Holland, Barbados, Shelter Island, a two hour DVD, rewrites Long Island history and explores Dutch-world history, slavery, sugar production, high tech archaeology, religious tolerance, and more. The DVD is available from the Suffolk County Archaeological Assn. PO Box 1542, Stony Brook, NY 11790, www.scaa-ny.org \$50.00 + \$6.00 S&H. NYS individual's sales tax \$4.36

NNI News

The 24th Annual Meeting of the New Netherland Institute will be held on Saturday, May 21st beginning with a luncheon at 11:45 am at the Stockade Inn in Schenectady. Following the business meeting of the Institute, Dirk Mouw, 2010 Hendricks Award winner, will give a talk entitled "A Silver Lining? How New Netherland Church-Goers Seized New Opportunities Presented by the English Conquest, 1665–1699." Members and friends are cordially invited to attend. For more information or to make a reservation online, go to: www.newnetherlandinstitute.org

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The NNI is accepting nominations for the annual Alice P. Kenney Memorial Award. This grant now enables the Institute to award an annual prize of \$1,000 to an individual or group which has made a significant contribution to colonial Dutch studies and/or has encouraged understanding of the significance of the Dutch colonial experience in North America by research, teaching, writing, speaking, or in other ways. For award criteria and to nominate, go to: bit.ly/faELdN

The NNI is also accepting applications for the Quinn–McNeil Fellowship. Applications for 2011–2012 are due by March 1, 2011. For a link to the application and fellowship details, go to: bit.ly/gh0ksj

Student and Senior Scholar applications are due May 15, 2011. For criteria and application details go to: bit.ly/hs8mh0

Requiescant in Pace

Two Former Trustees

John H. Van Schaick, 90, immediate past president of the Institute, died at his Schenectady home 4 January 2011. A visionary in many areas, John saw the role the Institute would play in his support over 30 years of the New Netherland Translation Project. The latest outcome is the installation last year of the New Netherland Research Center, New York State Library, 7th floor. In

2009, the Institute awarded John and his wife Sally the Howard G. Hageman Citation in recognition of their exceptional service.



Carol W. Hageman, 87, a former vice-president of the Friends of New Netherland, died at home in Guilderland 1 February 2011. She was the widow of Rev. Howard G. Hageman, one of the founders of The Friends of New Netherland. Throughout her marriage and beyond Carol as an exemplary wife of a minister lent her many talents to support her husband's activities and interests.

NNRC News

A key objective of the NNRC is to provide online access to primary sources from the New Netherland period in manuscript, transcription and translation. As previously noted, an online edition of the first volume of the *Register of the Provincial Secretary, 1638–1642*, has been completed. This volume was originally translated by E. B. O'Callaghan and improved and annotated by A. J. F. van Laer.

Online editions of three additional volumes from van Laer should be online later this year, along with translations of the New Netherland Papers of Hans Bontemantel, a Director of the Amsterdam Chamber of the WIC. The De Hooges Memorandum Book, 1643–1648 will include a scanned copy of the original documents, a transcription, and translation.

NNRC has begun a project with

the New York State Archives to scan the original manuscripts of the Curaçao Papers. These will be available online with the corresponding transcriptions and translations completed by the NNP over twenty years ago. A similar project is under way with the NYSL to scan a segment of the Van Rensselaer Manor papers.

Deborah Hamer, PhD candidate at Columbia University arrived in mid–December as the NNRC's first Student Scholar. Deborah is researching marriage policies and practices in seventeenth century Dutch colonies. Senior Scholar Eric Ruijssenaars, a Dutch historian and genealogist, and Student Scholar Alena Buis, PhD candidate at Queens University, will arrive in April.

Totidem Verbis

Out of the Ashes: A.J.F. van Laer
and the 1911 Fire
by
Peter A. Douglas

On March 29, 1911, the New York State Library, then in the Capitol, burned, and with it went some half a million books and 300,000 manuscripts, among them priceless colonial documents. In charge of the state archives at the time was a Dutch immigrant called A.J.F. van Laer (1869–1955), for whom that day's destruction was a particularly hard blow. As we mark the centenary of the fire, it's fitting that we remind ourselves of the great contribution to New Netherland scholarship that Van Laer made, not

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the least of which was what he did in the days following the fire.

Earlier in his career, Van Laer discovered the huge number of Dutch manuscripts from the 17th century in the state archives. Attempts had been made to make these documents available in English, but upon discovering that these translations were full of errors, Van Laer decided to do his own. When the fire struck, his translation and the original records were on his desk in the State Library, so his work was destroyed, together with the Dutch original. The 1911 fire, then, was a personal catastrophe to Van Laer, both in his official position and in his capacity as translator of Dutch colonial manuscripts.

Van Laer was eager to salvage anything he could, and on the second day after the fire he enlisted the assistance of I.N. Phelps Stokes, sent by the New York Public Library with sympathy and the offer of help. Access to the Manuscripts room on the third floor of the building was difficult and hazardous. The staircases were gone so they found a way in from above, using ladders. Preceded by two firemen, they climbed down to a gutted passageway through twisted beams and dripping water. Icicles had formed, the weather having turned colder. Behind the charred door of the Manuscripts room, “The sight,” Van Laer later wrote, “was appalling. Not a vestige of books, bookcases, or desks was to be seen, nothing but an empty shell, with four feet of smoldering debris on the floor. Fires were

starting up in various places, and water poured down from above. It seemed well-nigh hopeless to attempt to rescue anything under the conditions.” Despite the apparent futility of their efforts, Van Laer found where the Dutch records were buried. They pulled away the blackened and soggy mess and deep down they found paper, which, although heat-damaged and burned around the edges, still bore decipherable writing.

Van Laer and Stokes reported to Governor John Dix that there was material to be recovered in the wreck of the Capitol so they formed an urgent plan. From a nearby laundry they borrowed several large clothesbaskets and, with members of the National Guard forming a line, they gradually removed and passed to safety and preservation what remained of the documents.

That’s easy to write, but the personal danger that Van Laer and Stokes risked cannot be minimized. Van Laer reported: “Many of the volumes were so hot they could hardly be touched with the hand and some were actually burning along the edges.” The smoke was thick and choking, and twice Stokes was overcome by it and had to be taken outside to recover. Chunks of stone, mortar, and bricks were coming down, and a sentry was cut by falling glass. Later, most of the State Library staff pitched in despite the risk and discomfort. Fire hoses sprayed the ruins for thirty-six hours; it was cold and wet, and Van Laer and Stokes were soaked through, and they carried on with the work well after dark. As

the sifted remains were removed, Van Laer examined every shovelful lest a single vital scrap be overlooked.

For Van Laer, this went on day after day in that chilly April. His co-workers marveled that he didn’t catch pneumonia. He did, however, succumb to the traumatic consequences of the fire and the devastation wrought on the documents in his charge. The magnitude of the disaster seemed to check his erstwhile drive, and it was almost a decade before he resumed translating in earnest. The work was now, he said, “heartbreaking.” It was a bitter irony too, for when the library burned it was about to move into new quarters across Washington Avenue.

The Dutch records had endured numerous hazards, from normal wear and tear over the centuries to war and rebellion, relocation to Boston and back, and rats and mildew in the holds of British ships. The fire of 1911, however, was the worst misfortune to befall them, for never had they been so close to total destruction. For all the damage they suffered, that so much was saved is directly attributable to A.J.F. van Laer. In all, the surviving corpus of Dutch colonial records consists of about 12,000 pages; setting aside for the moment his excellent and groundbreaking translations, without his brave and selfless efforts in the days after the fire, that number could so easily have been much smaller. We owe him a great debt.

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