

“Prize” letter from Pieter Meesz Vrooman to his relatives in the Netherlands

This is the second Vrooman-related letter found among the papers taken from Dutch ships during wars with England in the 17th century. Pieter emigrated to New Netherland in 1654 most likely with his youngest brother Jacob. The oldest brother, Hendrick, would follow nine years later with his five children.¹ While Henderick was a farm laborer, Pieter appears to be a man of means. Although a carpenter by trade, he had disposal income. At auction in 1657 he won the bid for Johanna de Laet’s pantile kiln for f3,717. In 1660 he bought a house and garden in Beverwijck only to sell both a month later. It appears that the main purpose of the letter was to warn his brother Jacob about the English seizure of New Netherland. Good advice from his brother that he never received but most likely learned from other sources.

Praise God above all, the 12th of October 1664.

Honored, most beloved mother, and brother Jacop Meesz Vrooman,² and sister Marretgen Meesz Vrooman and all our good friends, I’m letting you know that I, my wife, and three sons are still sound and healthy, as long as it pleases God, and hope that it is the same with all of you. Were it otherwise, it would be painful for us to hear.

Mother, brother, and sister, I’m letting you know that we now shall have to learn English. And we may now sail to the north and to the Virginias and do business at all English places. The English have gone to the South to seize it³ and want also to have Canada, so that they will have the entire coast under their control. The *Maecquasen* are still at war with the *Anneconkesse*,⁴ so that it’s a bad time, as there is not much construction work. And the common man gets few beavers. I also intended to send some beavers, but I couldn’t get any. I got my horse back from the Old One,⁵ which I had sold him, so that he could get no beavers.

Brother Jacob, I’m letting you know that you should not return to New Netherland before I write you further news, for we don’t know yet how it shall go here. For the English have made good promises, if they keep them. But if it doesn’t turn out well, we will leave. But we shall see how things go for a year, for many people will leave because there are about 45 or 46 soldiers who are to stay at Fort Orange this winter and the people are supposed to feed them. But the English governor⁶ promises to pay them for it, if they are lucky. I have already been feeding a soldier for 10 days. My brother Heinderick is still sound and healthy with his children, and his children are still at our house.

Brother Jacob, please deliver this letter to the house at *Gelckom* [Gellicum]⁷ to my wife's mistress where she worked. Deliver it to *Gerckom's* skipper. Nothing more for the present except commendations to the Lord and wishing you a hundred thousand good nights.

Pieter Meesz Vrooman

[Addressed:]

This letter is to be
posted to Leider
Dorp for Arijaengen
Heinderick

¹ See the preceding letter in this series. There are no references to Hendrick's wife in the Netherlands. It is assumed that she died after providing him with five children.

² Pieter's brother Jacob had just returned to the Netherlands. He had been living with Jeremias van Rensselaer. He would not return to New York until 1680.

³ Reference to the South River region of New Netherland, which was administered by the city of Amsterdam as Nieuwer Amstel.

⁴ Although the name *Anneconkese* is unattested it is probably a reference to the Abenaki Indians northeast of the Mohawks.

⁵ The "Old One" appears as *de ouwen* in Dutch. It may be a reference to an Indian friend who provided beavers when he had use of a horse.

⁶ Richard Nicolls, commander of the invasion fleet and first English governor of New York (1664-1668).

⁷ Gellicum is in the province of Gelderland. It lies in the municipality of West Betuwe just west of Beesd. Pieter's wife, Gertruid Weckmans, worked at this estate before marrying and emigrating to New Netherland. More about this correspondence in the next "prize" letter.