



New Netherland Institute
Exploring America's Dutch Heritage

AUSTRALIA'S DUTCH COLUMBUS: NIEUW HOLLAND, NOT NEW NETHERLAND

By Peter Douglas



Willem Janszoon Blaeu

We just missed the 400th anniversary, but here's the information. It's worth a look as it's yet another example of the often understated but important role of the early Dutch in the history of the world.

Again it's the English that get the credit, for the Anglocentric claim that Captain Cook "discovered" Australia still has wide currency. However, in 1606, the Vereenigde Oostindische

Compagnie pinnace *Duyfken* (*Little Dove*) sailed into the Gulf of Carpentaria in what is now Queensland, Australia, and into history. Under the command of Willem Janszoon (c.1570-1630), it became the first European vessel to make a recorded landfall on the Australian coast, 164 years before James Cook sailed the eastern coast.

Sailing east from Bantam at the western end of Java in late 1605, the *Duyfken* was on an exploratory voyage for the VOC, as well as searching for gold and trade opportunities in the lands to the south and east. The route took the ship beyond Papua New Guinea and to the western side of what is now the Torres Strait. Here Janszoon turned south and sailed along the western side of Australia's Cape York Peninsula, making landfall at the Pennefather River near the modern town of Weipa on February 26, 1606. Janszoon found the land swampy and the indigenous people inhospitable, for they killed some of the crew on various land expeditions. Running out of provisions, he

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was compelled to turn back at a place he charted as Cape Keerweer (Cape Turnaround). Before returning home, Janszoon mapped hundreds of miles of coastline.

The continent was first known as "New Holland" (named "Nova Hollandia" by the Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman in 1644) and then Australia (officially adopted in 1824). In the Netherlands, "Nieuw Holland" would remain the usual name of the continent until the end of the 19th century; it is now no longer in use.

The Dutch charted huge areas of the west, north, and south coasts in search of spices and other trade goods, but they never colonized this land, perceiving it as barren and inhabited by hostile natives. The second Dutch ship to make landfall was the *Eendracht* (*Unity*) under the command of Dirk Hartog, on the western coast of the continent, in 1616. He named the place "Eendrachtsland." This was followed in 1618 by the *Zeewulf*, landing somewhat to the north of Hartog, and in 1627 by Francois Thijssen, who, in the *Gulden Zeepaert* (*Golden Seahorse*), explored more than 1,100 miles of the south Australian coast, and became the first European to see this part of the land.

Between 1606 and 1770, when James Cook explored the eastern coast and claimed New South Wales for Great Britain, more than forty Dutch vessels sailed to this new land. Clearly it's not just in the North American continent where the significance of the Dutch achievement has long been little known and under-appreciated!