

The Evidence for the Establishment of Collegiate School in 1628

Massimo Maglione
Collegiate School

The New York Historical Society's 1982 celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of Dutch-American diplomatic relations stimulated anew an interest in researching Collegiate's early years in New Amsterdam. In particular, an exhibition put on by the Historical Society to commemorate the first forty years of New York City displayed a section of the famous letter written on 11 August 1628 by Reverend Jonas Michaelius, the first Dutch Reformed minister in New Netherland, who arrived in that year; this letter intrigued several members of the Collegiate community because in it Reverend Michaelius expressed his passion for the religious education of Indian children. Further research on this letter and other documents compelled a reassessment of the school's origins. In fact, if one follows Lawrence A. Cremin, America's leading expert on colonial education, in defining education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities," there can be little question that the rudiments of education, under the auspices of Reverend Michaelius, began in New Amsterdam in 1628.¹

This investigation was not the first made into Collegiate's early history. At one point the school's early days aroused considerable controversy; this debate happened earlier in this century when William Heard Kilpatrick upbraided Henry W. Dunshee for stating in his work on the history of Collegiate School that the school began in 1633.² Kilpatrick was quite exercised about the whole matter; he launched his attack on Dunshee by focusing exclusively on when there was the first licensed teacher. In so doing, he had no difficulty establishing that Adam Roelantsen was the first "official schoolmaster" in 1638, since Roelantsen was certified as a schoolmaster in Holland in 1637 and most likely had not returned to New Netherland before the following year.³ Yet in his single-minded effort to prove wrong Dunshee's contention that 1633 was the founding date, Kilpatrick virtually ignored Reverend Michaelius' letter of 11 August 1628 and his important cultural influence on the Dutch colony.⁴ He never even commented on the possibility that Reverend Michaelius had promoted and

engaged in ecclesiastical education. Instead, he devoted much space on how the pre-1628 religious representatives could not have taught in New Amsterdam. (The role of these men as educators will be examined later.) One can only wonder why there is such a lacuna in Kilpatrick's analysis of this question. Perhaps he and I. N. Phelps Stokes, who agreed with him in the same strident terms, had the anti-clerical bias prevalent at the time, and thus were not predisposed to tracing the roots of education in the colony to a religious source.⁵ In any event, by being so narrowly empirical in their insistence that teaching could only be done by a certified schoolmaster, they imposed a modern and laical notion of education on the premodern and largely religious culture of the seventeenth century Dutch.⁶

The evidence tracing the origins of Collegiate School to 1628 can be divided into two parts: documentary and contextual. The former includes two letters of Jonas Michaelius. The most important letter was the aforementioned one written to Reverend Adrianus Smoutius. In this letter, Reverend Michaelius stated that he would go to any length to civilize the Indian children in the area by teaching them the Dutch language and Calvinist precepts. He was willing to entice "by means of presents and promises" Indian parents to hand over their children; he did not even care about the expense involved in this endeavor. This minister, in short, was prepared to bribe to achieve his goal. Such a strong statement evinces the extent of his commitment to educating children, even non-Christian Indian children.⁷ At another point in this letter, he even referred to past efforts at converting Indians in the area, a clear indication that some form of instruction had already been undertaken.⁸

The second piece of evidence concerns the letter that Michaelius wrote to Joannes van Foreest on 13 September 1630. In this letter, he demonstrated once again his unflinching interest in education by anxiously insisting that his son go to the University of Leyden.⁹ This interest must have carried over to his two children who were with him in the New World.¹⁰ In addition, the 1629 Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions lends support to the argu-

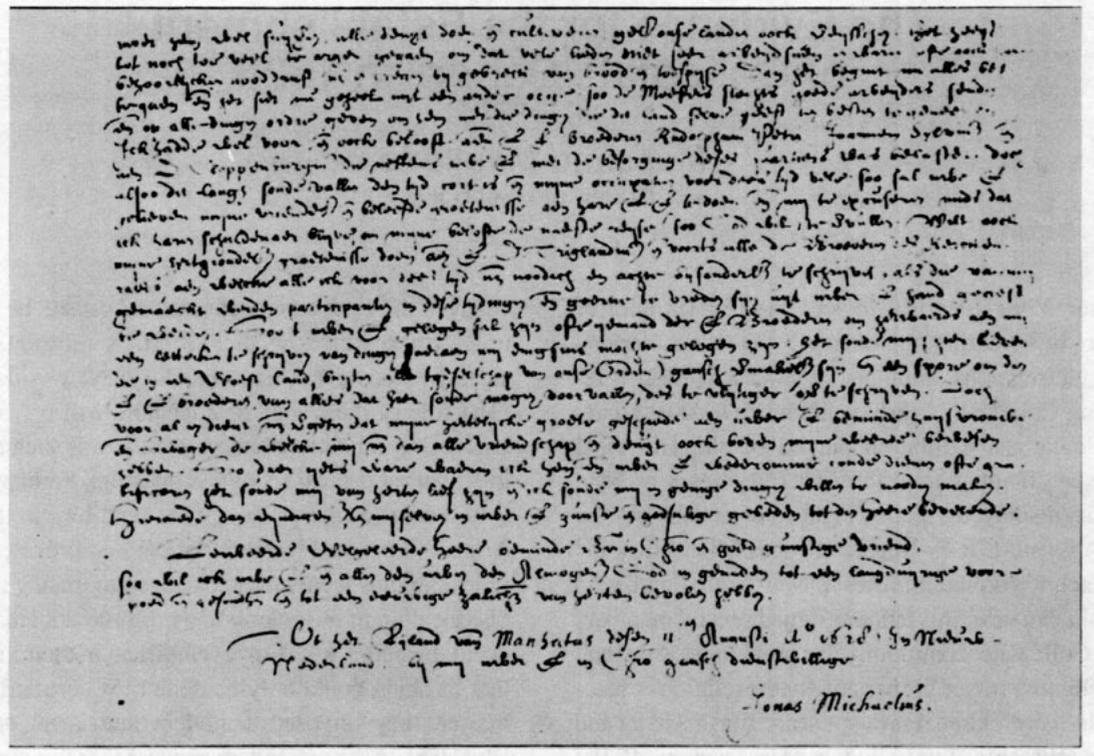


Fig. 33. Part of Michaelius letter of August 11, 1628.
 From *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York*, Vol. I, p. 336–37.
 Courtesy of the New York State Library.

ment that Reverend Michaelius was involved in educating children. This document is not that important in and of itself because it only speaks of the intention of creating a school.¹¹ Yet it has importance if it is remembered that Reverend Michaelius must have known about its existence, and thus this knowledge must have reinforced his commitment to educating the Dutch children in the colony before a school was officially chartered. It should be noted also that his own school records reveal that he was a highly educated man with a facility for languages.¹² Further, his zeal for educating natives as a missionary predated his arrival in New Netherland; he wrote about the need to educate two mulattos in Guinea, where he was stationed as a minister between 1625 and 1627.¹³

Finally, Reverend Michaelius' intense preoccupation with education during the 1620s reflected the theological position of a strict Calvinist or "Counter-Remonstrant." For such a man as Reverend Michaelius the only access which humans had to God's truth was through the written word as revealed and set down in sacred Scripture. Literacy for him and other "hard" Calvinist reformers was not a cultural option but a religious necessity.¹⁴

The impressive contextual evidence complements the foregoing evidence quite well. To begin with, Bastiaen Jansz Krol, the first Comforter of the Sick¹⁵ in New Netherland, arriving in 1624, was given orders by Willem Verhulst, the colony's provisional director, about January 1625, concerning missionary work. Verhulst desired that "the Indians be instructed in the Christian religion out of God's Holy Word." Another document reveals that within a few years Krol was "well acquainted with the language."¹⁶ Two historians of the Dutch colony argued that the word "language" refers to the language spoken by the local Indians.¹⁷ This latter document implies, in other words, that Krol had the linguistic abilities needed to carry out Verhulst's order while he was a Comforter of the Sick. In addition, it is known that the Comforters in the early seventeenth century "were also frequently asked to assist in the catechismal instruction of the youth" of New Amsterdam.¹⁸ In particular, Jan Huygens, another Comforter of the Sick, who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1626, was also instructed to catechize all children in the colony.¹⁹ Incidentally, Reverend Michaelius thought highly of Huygens.²⁰ It is clear, therefore, that the extremely religious Reverend Michaelius as the first ordained minister of New Nether-

land could not have done any less in the field of education than the Comforters of the Sick who preceded him.

The evidence for early schooling in New Netherland is also buttressed by the insights of Lawrence A. Cremin. He stated that "at the outset preaching and catechizing were the forms of education most widely practiced in each of the North American colonies planted during the first half of the seventeenth century."²¹ He also pointed out that "schooling went on anywhere," and that people "were taught by anyone," including clergymen; he further argued that "whatever lines there were in the metropolis between petty schooling and grammar schooling were virtually absent in the colonies."²² In particular, he indicated that Dutch ministers played an important role in instructing children in the colonies.²³ Interestingly, Otto F. Kraushaar, another scholar on the history of education in the United States, made similar points for the early seventeenth century.²⁴

The commitment on the part of the Dutch clergy to education was an integral part of the ecclesiastical history of Holland and Europe as a whole.²⁵ Calvin himself, of course, set down the role of pastor as educator in *The Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1547*.²⁶ This role was

reaffirmed in subsequent synods in Holland; it was especially "developed" in the synod of Dort which took place in the early seventeenth century.²⁷ These recommendations on pastoral educational duties were followed scrupulously in Holland: schools sprang up throughout the country in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, even in remote rural areas.²⁸ Needless to say, militant Calvinists like Reverend Michaelius and his successor Reverend Everardus Bogardus, who was also deeply religious and highly cultivated, must have taken this tradition quite seriously.²⁹

Thus, all the evidence strongly suggests that some form of instruction of the young by Reverend Michaelius took place in New Amsterdam as early as 1628. Such instruction should not be seen, of course, as the beginning of an organized school, supervised by a licensed teacher. Rather, what is contended is that the mostly inferential evidence suggests in a powerful way that Collegiate School has a longer history, albeit of an informal nature, than previously thought. In fact, only the most abstract and ahistorical criteria for the beginning of education would insist on the actual issuance of a charter in order to speak of schooling in this sense, especially in a primitive colonial setting.

Notes

¹Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial experience 1607–1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), xii.

²William Heard Kilpatrick, *The Dutch Schools of New Netherland and Colonial New York* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), Chapter III passim; Henry W. Dunshee, *History of the School of the Collegiate Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York from 1638 to 1883* (New York: Aldine Press, 1883), 15.

³Kilpatrick, 44–49.

⁴*Ibid.*, 48.

⁵I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1499–1909*, 6 vols. (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915–1928), 4:86.

⁶There is a plethora of controversies surrounding Roelantsen's hazy whereabouts in the early 1630s; fortunately these matters are not germane to this study. The same can be said of the statement that children should be educated found in a 1632 New Netherland pre-marriage contract, whose date has been challenged by historians.

⁷Edward T. Corwin, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York*, 7 vols. (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, 1901–1916), 70.

⁸*Ibid.*, 58.

⁹Albert Eekhof, *Jonas Michaelius: Founder of the Church in New Netherland* (Leyden: Sythoff's, 1926), 70.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹*Ecclesiastical Records*, I:78.

¹²Eekhof, 25.

¹³*Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴George L. Smith, *Religion and Trade in New Netherland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 44–60, 108–09, 158–66; Lewis W. Spitz, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 114–15.

¹⁵The Comforters of the Sick were the first representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Netherland; although they were not ordained ministers, they had many of the same functions. In fact, Dunshee said that since the Comforters had educational responsibilities, one could posit "the introduction of public education as early as 1626" (Dunshee, 15). In the light of the strong evidence for Reverend Michaelius' interest in starting some form of education in the colony, it is prudent to argue for the 1628 date.

¹⁶Eekhof, 5.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 5. Gerald Francis De Jong, "The Ziekentroosters or the Comforters of the Sick in New Netherland," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, LIV (October 1970), 347–48.

¹⁸De Jong, 343.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 348.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 350.

²¹Cremin, 176.

²²*Ibid.*, 192–93.

²³*Ibid.*, 164.

²⁴Otto F. Kraushaar, *Private Schools: From the Puritans to the Present* (Bloomington, IN: The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1976), 7–9.

²⁵John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pt. III passim.

²⁶Spitz, 122–25.

²⁷Dunshee, 3–5.

²⁸Jan de Vries, *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500–1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 211–13.

²⁹Smith, 167–70.