

“A name dear to every American of Dutch descent”:

The Story of the Holland Society’s Journal, *de Halve Maen*

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In October of 1922, a small, four-page, orange leaflet appeared in the mailboxes of the members of The Holland Society of New York. Over subsequent decades, what began in that year as a breezy newsletter intended to attract the Jazz Age scions of the more affluent descendants of New Netherland expanded and changed format to become a serious journal devoted to New Netherland scholarship. The impetus behind the changes in the magazine’s format says perhaps as much about the transformations in American culture in general over the past nine decades as it does about either The Holland Society of New York or New Netherland studies.

The post-World War I period witnessed rapid changes in American society. The Holland Society of New York was caught up in this process. What had originated in the 1880s as an elite, male Manhattan hereditary organization for those of Dutch descent found in the post-war period a youthful membership expanding beyond the New York metropolitan area. In 1921, the Society undertook steps to create local chapters outside of Manhattan. As a consequence, branches were organized on Long Island, in Albany, in Richmond, Rockland, Dutchess, and Ulster counties, in New Jersey, and on the West Coast. To keep this increasingly far-flung membership aware of Society events and to supplement the Society’s *Year Book*, the publication of which had become sporadic due to escalating costs, in May 1922, a proposal for a members’ newsletter was put

forward before the Trustees and quickly adopted. Society Secretary Frederic Keator and Trustee Teunis Bergen were instrumental in putting together the first issue, which appeared in October of that year. Entitled *de Halve Maen* after Henry Hudson's ship, *Half Moon*, "a name dear to every American of Dutch descent," as the editors wrote, the newsletter consisted of a single sheet of sturdy, orange paper printed on both sides and folded to create four pages.

Teunis Bergen, who for decades was a moving force within the Society, exercised editorial control. Beginning with the first issue, *de Halve Maen* included, in addition to Society news, short fillers on the settlement of New Netherland. With the second issue, biographical sketches of outstanding New Netherland settlers were added. By today's scholarly standards, these shorts appear quaint and filiopietistic, but they raised *de Halve Maen* a notch above the "collegiate" newsletters that the publication emulated. Although the newsletter was supposed to appear quarterly, by 1926, only two issues appeared and the following year, one. In the hope of encouraging greater member participation in the submission of entries, in 1928, *de Halve Maen* was expanded onto a larger-sized sheet. Nonetheless, the enlarged format, as well as the death of Teunis Bergen in March 1929, failed to generate the intended results.

The newsletter barely survived the next few years. The stock market crash of October 1929 brought about a dramatic decline in the Society's membership by nearly twenty percent. Moreover, with rapidly diminishing funds, the Society's Trustees deleted from the Society's program all publications, including the *Year Book*. This action undoubtedly allowed the newsletter to survive, albeit somewhat tenuously. In July 1932, Wilfred B. Talman began his many years of editing the publication. To bolster morale, Talman began to run articles reassuring members that their Dutch tenacity would pull them through the economic difficulties. In July

1933, for example, there appeared in *de Halve Maen* a letter by Dr. A. J. Barnouw of the Netherland-America Foundation, who wrote, “Apparently our Dutch ancestors derived much of their love of liberty and tenacity of purpose from the sea itself . . . Seafaring people are arch-conservatives. The insecurity of life on the ocean seems to make them tenacious of all that they possess on land [and] has bred into the race a spirit of rugged independence.” By the mid-1930s, the orange-colored newsletter was again appearing with regularity, and in 1940 the page size was again increased as the result of a plan for unifying the size of all Society publications with that of the former *Year Book*.

The most dramatic change to *de Halve Maen*, however, was brought about by World War II. With the July 1943 issue, Wil Talman stepped down as editor, although he remained on the editorial board until his death in 1986, and Walter H. Van Hoesen took over. The newsletter was now expanded to an eight-page, 8 ½ x 11 inch, glossy magazine format with the orange Holland Society’s seal on a white cover. This expanded format allowed for the inclusion of “Military Intelligence” and “Personal Mention” columns so that members could keep in touch with the activities of those serving and an expanded coverage of Society activities to keep those abroad in touch with home events. By that date, 115 members, or about one-fifth of the Society, were in the armed forces. A November 1943 editorial, for example, sent words of encouragement to the continuing Dutch resistance against Nazi occupation: “Today with Holland under the heel of the conqueror and every human right curtailed,” it stated, “it is well to look back on the situation three hundred years ago. An Indian war had all but destroyed the colony of New Netherland and the remnants of a panic-stricken people crowded around the Fort for protection. In those days,” it continued, “pioneer Americans looked back to the peace and security of Holland. Holland, in her

turn, now looks to us for emancipation. From her came the great freedoms of Worship, speech and education.”

The changes made in 1943 became the standard format for the magazine. Slowly Van Hoesen introduced other innovations. In 1944, a woodcut print of Henry Hudson’s ship *Half Moon* replaced the Society’s seal as the cover illustration. The ship would remain the cover illustration for the next half century. In 1946, the first black and white photograph appeared inside the back cover, and in 1951, the number of pages was expanded to twelve. Illustrations nonetheless remained a rarity throughout the 1950s. Van Hoesen also introduced short historical and genealogical essays by Society members into what had previously been a purely social content theme as well as book reviews. The editorial tone of the magazine throughout the 1950s, not surprisingly, reflected the strongly conservative nationalism of the majority of the Holland Society’s members. The adulation given to such national figures as J. Edgar Hoover provide for historians of twentieth-century America a fascinating window into a mentalité of a segment of America’s population during the Cold War era.

With the July 1958 issue, the “good ship *de Halve Maen*,” as the editorial in that issue stated, “set sail on the first of her quarterly voyages under a new skipper,” Richard Amerman. Amerman was professionally involved in publishing at Prentice Hall, and under his editorship the changes initiated by Walter Van Hoesen accelerated. *De Halve Maen* now became a “treasure trove” of short essays relating to the history and genealogy of the Dutch in America; short essays now were not only provided by Holland Society members but also by such distinguished Dutch scholars as Simon Hart and Jan Kupp. By the mid-1970s, Amerman was also introducing new scholars such as Alice P. Kenney and Ruth Piwonka, whose writings

eventually would have a tremendous impact on New Netherland studies. In 1959, a fifty-two-page index of the *Year Book, de Halve Maen*, and other publications was completed to aid researchers. The index to *de Halve Maen* was updated in 1977.

In 1976, Dick Amerman retired due to health reasons, and the Rev. Dr. Howard Hageman took over the magazine's editorship. Dr. Hageman was a well-known Reformed theologian, and the magazine quickly reflected his passionate intellectual interests. For the first time, it can be truly said that *de Halve Maen* became a repository of scholarly essays on the Dutch in America and the Netherlands. Moreover, the translation work of Dr. Charles Gehring and the New Netherland Project sparked an explosion in New Netherland studies. Scholars now vied to have their latest research and theories published in the journal. By the mid-1980s, eleven hundred copies of each issue were being printed, enough for each Society member and to meet requests from libraries, historical societies, and other organizations. In June 1983, Dr. Hageman was awarded the Order of Orange-Nassau by Queen Beatrix for his outstanding contributions to promoting Dutch-American relations and the heritage of New Netherland as editor of *de Halve Maen*.

In 1990, I succeeded Howard Hageman as *de Halve Maen* editor. At that date, the journal was still being set in hot type by a firm in Poughkeepsie, which also oversaw the copy editing of the articles as well as the magazine's design format and layout. Within a year, however, Society executive secretary Barbara Stankowski determined that with rapidly advancing computer technology we could produce the issues in camera-ready copy at Society headquarters at considerable savings to the Society. Annette van Rooy, who followed Barbara as Society secretary, played an invaluable role during my early years in setting up the computer design

programs and teaching me computer design skills.

My first issue, however, turned out to be one of “trial by fire.” For in that issue, I published an essay by an African American scholar and friend of mine, who suggested with reliable research that miscegenation had occurred between free blacks and whites in New Netherland. As difficult as it may be to believe today, nineteen years ago, the article created outrage among several of the magazine’s readers, who began harassing me for publishing an essay daring to suggest that New Netherlanders were, as one reader complained, a “mulatto population.” The Holland Society’s Trustees acted swiftly to squash this embarrassing manifestation of ignorance. Moreover, backed by hard evidence gathered by Henry Hoff and Harry Macy of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, the scholar’s research proved to be incontestable. Nonetheless, the controversy left me stunned and even more determined that under my editorship *de Halve Maen* would **not** serve as an instrument to whitewash the past. Rather, my intention became, with the Trustees’ encouragement, to ensure that the journal would serve as a forum for the dissemination of all aspects of, and theories about, New Netherland, no matter how controversial.

In order to obtain this objective, Charly Gehring and his staff at the New Netherland Project have proved invaluable partners. Indeed, there has been a symbiotic relationship between the Project’s seminars and *de Halve Maen* for decades. In 1971, Holland Society Trustee Ralph DeGroff organized the first of what would later become the Rensselaerswijck Seminar. This seminar, entitled “The Cultural Mosaic of New Netherland,” was held at the Institute for Man and Sciences in Rensselaerville, New York, in October of that year. At this first seminar, all of the speakers were Holland Society members. The interest generated by this seminar led to

another the following year, at which two outside scholars, Dr. Kenneth Scott and Dr. Kenn Stryker-Rodda, joined the Society's speakers. In 1979, DeGroff turned the organizing of these seminars over to the New Netherland Project with the stipulation that the papers presented appear in *de Halve Maen*. The Rensselaerswijck Seminar was now initiated as the premier yearly assemblage of New Netherland scholars. Ever since, the journal has been proud to publish many of the papers first read at these eminent gatherings.

During the past nineteen years of my editorship, *de Halve Maen* has published essays by virtually every scholar working in the field. New research by such students of New Netherland as Peter Christoph, Firth Fabend, Willem Frijhoff, Joyce Goodfriend, Jaap Jacobs, Donna Merwick, Ruth Piwonka, Janny Venema, and far too many others to mention in this brief talk, were first presented in its pages. During this period, I also made numerous changes to *de Halve Maen*'s format. Perhaps the most noticeable change is in the cover. Since April 1944, the standard cover had been the print of Henry Hudson's ship *Half Moon*. My first change was to redesign the cover and provide each issue with a unique cover illustration. In the year 2000, I introduced full-color issues. In order to provide more space for the expanding world of scholarly discoveries, the "Members' News" column, which now appears in a separate Society members' Newsletter, has been replaced with "Here and There in New Netherland Studies." Other changes have been in type fonts and page design. And we have just printed a new index to all the *de Halve Maen* issues through 2007 produced by Patricia Hatcher.

My design efforts for the magazine have, admittedly, been influenced by other publications. Foremost among these is *Colonial Williamsburg*, a sophisticated glossy magazine produced by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. As *Colonial Williamsburg* does so

successfully, I also attempt to make scholarly essays attractive for both academic and popular consumption. Unfortunately, unlike *Colonial Williamsburg* with its large and talented staff, the *de Halve Maen* staff consists mostly of me. From the conception of each issue, through editing, to the final color layout, I wear all the hats. Moreover, financial costs constrain issue size. Pages are done in multiples of four, and the addition of each multiple increases not only printing costs but mailing costs. Nonetheless, I am most fortunate to have the services of a superior copy editor in Joy Rich, who carefully reads each article twice: first following its initial editing and again in page proofs.

Current plans for *de Halve Maen* center around today's rapidly changing technologies. In the past year, the journal's creation has undergone a difficult transition as older computer programs have become obsolete and been replaced. This has resulted in a painful period during which new programs had to be acquired and learned, slowing down production. Today, the journal, which consists of a printing of about fifteen hundred copies per issue, is totally produced in-house and sent to the printer via FTP files. Moreover, The Holland Society is currently exploring ways of making the journal also accessible to a larger readership over the Internet. Through all of these changes, I have had the dedicated support of the chairs of the *de Halve Maen* Committee, first by the late Jim Quackenbush and presently by Peter Van Dyke, who have persistently advocated the interests of the magazine before the Society's Trustees. I am also most fortunate to have a wonderful working relationship with our printer, The Sheridan Press, and their superb representative, Kim Salois. Above all, it is all those scholars whose hard work and tireless devotion to the discipline of New Netherland studies who truly make *de Halve Maen*, and it is to them that I am most obligated.

American society will continue, as it has over the past nine decades, to transform itself, and, in the process, so will The Holland Society of New York and its journal, *de Halve Maen*. There is no doubt that future editors of the magazine will continue to improve upon the hard work and high standards of those who preceded me. Yet, after nineteen years of editing this journal devoted to New Netherland studies, there is one thing that I am absolutely convinced of: we have only barely begun to scratch the surface of understanding the fascinating Dutch colony of New Netherland and its legacy. There are still so many topics waiting to be researched, so many new theories to be put forth, so many voices yet to be heard, and so many stories still to be uncovered. *De Halve Maen* will undoubtedly continue to play a leading role in bringing the hard labors of New Netherland scholars and the exciting story of the Dutch in America before the wider public for generations to come.

Thank you.