The colony of New Netherland was a commercial venture through which the mercantile barons who, as directors of the Dutch West India Company, sought to challenge the French for control of a potentially lucrative North American fur trade. Within three decades of the initial exploration, the company leadership realized that the success of their venture was tied to Dutch ability to settle some of the land with colonists who could grow and otherwise produce goods and services that would support the activities of company fur traders. Among the principal considerations for the successful establishment of European-style civilization in the New World was the necessity of imposing order in the American wilderness. Although they disagreed on most other matters, the company directors collectively understood that the imposition of such order followed the establishment of Roman-Dutch law and the subsequent administration of justice in the colony.

In 1626, the directors appointed Jan Lampo to serve in America as schout fiscal, or chief officer of the law. This office was to combine the duties of a modern-day sheriff and public prosecutor. Lampo was engaged to oversee the administration of justice for the entire province. But because early New Netherland consisted of just two fortified outposts located over 150 miles apart and inhabited by only a few hundred Europeans, the actual law enforcement at the northern trading post called Fort Orange was left to the fort’s commander. As long as the number of settlers remained small, and while these colonists lived in close proximity, order and discipline could be maintained by the West India Company representatives at the fort on the site of today’s Albany.

Although prospects for great success in the North American fur trade were considerable, as late as 1629 the permanent existence of New Netherland still was in doubt. While the European demand for beaver hats and coats continued to increase, pelts became more difficult to obtain once the initial supply in the Hudson and lower Mohawk valleys had been exhausted. Company officials soon understood that to reach more deeply into the American interior for beavers, the frontier would have to be expanded and permanent settlements offering regular life services and comforts would have to be established. However, few Dutchmen could be persuaded to emigrate to risk their lives in the New World for the sole benefit of the West India Company directors. Inducements would be required.

In 1629, the company issued the Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions which permitted certain responsible individuals to establish personal estates in New Netherland. These so-called “patroons” were authorized to appropriate large acreage plantations, to contract with farmers, agricultural processors, and artisans to become their tenants, and to rule their patroonships with many of the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities that had been bestowed on feudal lords in Europe. The fur trade, however, was to be the exclusive domain of the West India Company. By establishing patroonships, the company hoped to populate the colony with permanent settlers who would concentrate on the development of natural resources other than those of the fur bearing animals.

Several patroonships were authorized. But the only permanent success was Rensselaerswijck, the 600-square-mile domain of Killiaen van Rensselaer, an Amsterdam diamond magnate and West India Company director. This director was the leader of the company faction that advocated intensive and long-term, internal development of the colony as the best way to achieve permanent success. During the 1630s and 1640s he searched across Holland for able and even-tempered settlers, signed them to service contracts, and sent them (often with their families) across the Atlantic to Rensselaerswijck. At every opportunity, Van Rensselaer reminded them and their overseers of the virtues of tilling the land and of providing the services specified in their contracts.

Among other things, the patroon was charged with the responsibility for implementing and enforcing company ordinances and policies in his domain, particularly those prohibiting tenants from privately engaging in the fur
Three weeks later from his Amsterdam counting house position of "officer." As such, Rutger Hendricksen was anxious for his representative to cultivate the cooperation of the company and especially of its soldiers friendship that could be mutually beneficial. The patroon Rensselaer empowered the body, the Rensselaerswijck farmer, to serve as schout. Van Rensselaer issued instructions for the appointment of the next schout-officer, to serve as schout for a period of three years which began with his arrival in the colony in August 1634. Recognizing the importance of maintaining continuity in the schout's office, the patroon had insisted that Planck agree not to leave the position for three years on pain of heavy reparations. Like his predecessor, Jacob Albertsen also was given the position of officer which entitled him to a remuneration of one-third of the fines he collected on ordinance violations, and to a silver-plated sword and belt, which he was to receive from the company Director-General in New Amsterdam upon taking the oath of office.

Planck's duties as officer and schout were more clearly defined and would be exacting as well as diverse. He was directed to exercise "proper supervision over all the men, farms, animals and everything else that may have to be done" in the name of the patroon. Like his predecessor, Planck was to receive from the company Director-General in New Amsterdam upon taking the oath of office.

Kiliaen van Rensselaer sought to apply what he learned from his dealings with Rutger Hendricksen van Soest to the appointment of the next schout. Van Rensselaer contracted with a North Hollander named Jacob Albertsen Planck to serve as schout for a period of three years which began with his arrival in the colony in August 1634. Recognizing the importance of maintaining continuity in the schout's office, the patroon had insisted that Planck agree not to leave the position for three years on pain of heavy reparations. Like his predecessor, Jacob Albertsen also was given the position of officer which entitled him to a remuneration of one-third of the fines he collected on ordinance violations, and to a silver-plated sword and belt, which he was to receive from the company Director-General in New Amsterdam upon taking the oath of office.

Planck's duties as officer and schout were more clearly defined and would be exacting as well as diverse. He was directed to exercise "proper supervision over all the men, farms, animals and everything else that may have to be done" in the name of the patroon. Like his predecessor, Planck was to receive from the company Director-General in New Amsterdam upon taking the oath of office.

Planck's duties as officer and schout were more clearly defined and would be exacting as well as diverse. He was directed to exercise "proper supervision over all the men, farms, animals and everything else that may have to be done" in the name of the patroon. Like his predecessor, Planck was to receive from the company Director-General in New Amsterdam upon taking the oath of office.

As with other things, Kiliaen van Rensselaer held strong opinions regarding exactly where in the colony his schout-officer should reside. Planck had been directed to
not proper for you and you far exceed your bounden duty in criticizing my administration and this once more on slanderous statements that I am sending informers into the country.\textsuperscript{25} The patron then made it clear that he thought that none of his employees, least of all his chief officer, should be "reproaching, hindering, worrying and accusing" his regulation of the patronship. Reflecting again on the subject of promotions, the patron reiterated that the proper and indeed only avenue for advancement would be through the faithful observance of the officer's oath and of the patron's instructions and advisements. Finally, he chided Van der Donck on what had become the chronic problem of the infrequency and brevity of the officer's reports on affairs in the colony.\textsuperscript{26}

Kiliaen van Rensselaer had placed great stock in Adriaen Cornelissen's ability and willingness to serve as his eyes and ears in the New World. Diligent attention to the duties of the positions of schout and officer would maintain order and discipline in the colony and would pave the way for the responsible development of the large Hudson Valley estate. But, above all, the administration of justice would protect and further the patron's own interests.

The patron's charges against Chief Officer Van der Donck were well founded. Despite subtle reminders that he could replace Adriaen Cornelissen with any of several individuals (and particularly with one Nicholas Coorn whom Van Rensselaer believed understood the duties of the chief officer), the patron continued to receive reports of Van der Donck's self-seeking life-style. Although the officer did erect a small house on Castle Island to serve as his regular domicile, he had relinquished neither title to nor interest in the tract of land on the Groote Vlacke or Great Flat of the Mohawk River west of today's Schenectady. In addition, Adriaen Cornelissen also had expressed interest in patenting and developing the land at the mouth of the Nepperhan (later Sawmill) River. As a postscript to this story, Van der Donck's ambition was fulfilled for the city of Yonkers of furs in private. When a sloop appeared in the river near Rensselaerswijck in 1642, the patron's tenants freely dealt their furs after they had claimed they had no beavers to sell to Van Curler. This was a clear violation of the fur trading ordinance which included a provision for a tax on exported furs. Van Curler called on Van der Donck to search the houses of those suspected of trading in hope of finding the goods the suspects had received for their pelts. Adriaen Cornelissen and Hans Vos, his assistant, went to several homes, conversed with the owners, but

According to Van Curler, Van der Donck also was negligent in enforcing regulations prohibiting the trading of furs in private. When a sloop appeared in the river near Rensselaerswijck in 1642, the patron's tenants freely dealt their furs after they had claimed they had no beavers to sell to Van Curler. This was a clear violation of the fur trading ordinance which included a provision for a tax on exported furs. Van Curler called on Van der Donck to search the houses of those suspected of trading in hope of finding the goods the suspects had received for their pelts. Adriaen Cornelissen and Hans Vos, his assistant, went to several homes, conversed with the owners, but
searched only the home of Dirck Jansen—who was Van der Donck’s enemy. Finding contraband duffles there, the officer seized them. But no other searches were made.\textsuperscript{30} By that time, Van Curler understood that Van der Donck was determined to ruin him in the colony and to discredit him in the patroon’s eyes. In addition to the above incidents, he further denounced officer Van der Donck as “self-seeking and grasping,” and as a “dog [who] bite[s] me and daily seek[s] to render me suspected.”\textsuperscript{31}

The testimony of his kinsman, Van Curler, the equally unflattering remarks of his friend and Rensselaerswyck minister, Johannes Megapolensis, and other reports of Van der Donck’s cavalier attitude toward the wishes of his employer, combined to persuade Van Rensselaer to take drastic steps to put an end to the chaos caused by the absence of law enforcement in the colony.

By 1643, French and New England traders were active all over the patroonship and threatened to siphon off all of the wheat and furs and thus the patroon’s profits from the labor of his tenants. To check the encroachments of illegal traders as described by Van Curler in 1642, the patroon appointed Nicholas Coom as commander and commis of Rensselaers Steyn on Beeren Island which commanded the southern entrance to the colony. With the appointment of Coom in late August 1643, the authority of Van der Donck had been superceded. Beeren Island was strategically located so that any ship attempting to enter the colony would have to pass before the guns of Rensselaers Steyn which the patroon had fortified in September. Thus, water-borne attempts by outsiders to poach on the patroon’s domain could be nipped in the bud. At the same time, the majority of Van Rensselaer’s tenants would fall under the watchful eyes of Nicholas Coom.\textsuperscript{32}

Adriaen van der Donck did not appear to be intimidated by the appointment of Coom and seems to have been preoccupied with his own affairs. Although he technically held the position of chief officer until the death of the patroon later in 1643, Van der Donck long since had ceased any pretense of discharging the responsibilities of his office. Instead he took title to his own plantation of Colendonck and left Rensselaerswyck permanently after his farm on Castle Island burned in January 1646.\textsuperscript{33}

By the summer of that year, Nicholas Coom had succeeded to the offices of schout and officer. He held those positions until the arrival of the new director, Brant Aertsz van Slichtenhorst, in March 1648. Coom then was relegated to the position of Officer Luytenant (deputy sheriff), and served in that capacity until replaced by Van Slichtenhorst’s nephew, Gerrit van Wenckum.\textsuperscript{34}

The administration of justice under the first patroon was really the story of Kiliaen van Rensselaer’s efforts to see his rights and investments in the colony managed by a succession of handpicked employees who were given the titles of officers of the law or of justice. But since the law was defined by Van Rensselaer as the rights and privileges granted by the Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions and subsequent documents, it is not surprising that no record exists of tenant rights being upheld. In fact, the subject was not even mentioned in passing in the Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts, the most comprehensive source for assessing the patroonship of Kiliaen van Rensselaer.

The first patroon’s officers of justice were invested with the authority to safeguard their employer’s rights and property in the upper Hudson Valley. Kiliaen van Rensselaer sought to direct and motivate his schouts and officers separated by over 3,000 miles of ocean. Meanwhile, the patroon’s appointees in America took advantage of their positions for personal aggrandize-ment. The tenures of Jacob Planck and Adriaen van der Donck have been particularly good examples of the triumph of personal ambition in an arena characterized by tremendous opportunities available to those who came to the New World. While Kiliaen van Rensselaer admonished his officials to hold Rensselaerswyck tenants to the terms of their contracts, his own enforcement officials were too pre-occupied with their own affairs to be concerned with the patroon’s pleas for “justice.”
Notes


3 The issuance of the Charter of Freedom and Exemptions is considered by Rink, Holland on the Hudson, in chapter four. In general, Rink's discussion supersedes Condon in New York Beginnings, 123-27. The charter appears in Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts: Being the Letters of Kiliaen van Rensselaer, 1630-1643, and other Documents Relating to the Colony of Rensselaerswyck, translated and edited by Arnold J. F. Van Laer (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1908), 137-53, and hereafter cited as VRBM. This source also documents the patron's efforts in contracting tenants to develop his American holdings. Van Rensselaer's intentions regarding the fur trade are described in Rink, Holland on the Hudson, 194.

4 The standard work on Rensselaerswyck during the seventeenth century still is Samuel G. Nissenson, The Patroon's Domain: The Patroon System as Embodied in Rensselaerswyck New York Through the Dutch and English Periods (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937). Although Oliver Rink has presented considerable new material on Rensselaerswyck (most impressively on its tenant population), the development of the manor is not the major focus of Holland on the Hudson; see especially 144-56, and 194-98 for the ambitions of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. A more comprehensive study of Rensselaerswyck over time is needed. Minutes of the Court of Rensselaerswyck, 1648-1652, translated and edited by Arnold J. F. Van Laer (Albany: Univ. of the State of New York, 1922), 7, and hereafter cited as CMR.

5 VRBM, 211.

6 Nissenson, Patroon's Domain, 92-93; CMR, 7-9. The patron's instructions to Van Soest are translated in VRBM, 201-2, 204-5, 208-11.


9 CMR. 10. VRBM, 201, 204, 229, 266, and 67n, 300. Planck also held the position of "procureur and distiller of brandy," ibid., 67. Nissenson, Patroon's Domain, 98.

10 VRBM, 430.

11 Kiliaen van Rensselaer to Willem Kieft, May 12, 1639, quoted in CMR, 10. Van Rensselaer to Planck, May 74, 1635, September 21 and December 25, 1637, VRBM, 313-14, 330, 353, 391, 396-97, 467. Planck's failure to keep the patron informed disturbed Van Rensselaer to the extent that his stated reason for appointing Van Curler was so that an assistant could "copy everything and write me of all more at length than has been done thus far," ibid., 398. Van Rensselaer to Wouter van Twiller, ibid., 396.


1641, ibid., 547. CMR, 10. VRBM: 534, 543, 547, 549, 557.
14Van Rensselaer to Van der Donck, July 23, 1641, VRBM, 571-72. Van Laer’s translation of the fifth article of the Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions appears in ibid., 139-41.
16Van Rensselaer to Van Curler, September 29, 1641, ibid., 577-78. See also ibid., 626-27.
17Van Rensselaer to Johannes Megapolensis, June 3, 1642, ibid., 616-17, see also 824. I am unclear whether the “Great Flat” referred to at this point during the early 1640s was located on the west bank of the Hudson or the south side of the Mohawk above what became Albany and Schenectady, respectively.
18Van Rensselaer to Van der Donck, March 9, 1643, ibid., 631.
19Ibid., 630-644.
20Ibid., 636.
21Ibid., 637.
22Ibid., 640.
23Ibid., 641.
24Ibid., 642.
25Ibid., 642.
26Ibid., 642-644.
27Van Rensselaer to Megapolensis, March 13, 1643, ibid., 649-50. For the “Great Flat,” see ibid., 616-17.
28Calendar of Historical Manuscripts in the Office of the Secretary of State: Dutch, edited by Edmund B. O’Callaghan (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1865), 83.
30Ibid., 25.
31Ibid., 23, 23n.
32Van Rensselaer to Van der Donck, March 9, 1643, ibid., 649-50, 655; “Commission to Nicolaes Coorn,” August 26, 1643, ibid., 680-82; “Account of ammunition for Rensselaers Steyn,” ibid., 706-7, which included three cannon, shot, powder, firelocks, pistols, spears, and a “silver-plated sword for Coren,” CMR, 11.
33VRBM, 824. Adriaen van der Donck, A Description of the New Netherlands (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968).
34VRBM, 830; CMR, 11-12.