Upcoming Events

September 20, 2003. The 26th annual Rensselaerswijck Seminar will be held in NYC in the hall of the New York Genealogical Society. This year’s theme will be: “Nieuw Amsterdam: A Dutch City in the New World,” in commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the city’s charter. Speakers will be: Jaap Jacobs “To Favor this New and Growing City of New Amsterdam with a Court of Justice.” The 1653 Municipal Charter of New Amsterdam”; Leo Hershkowitz “Chance or Choice: New Amsterdam 1654, a Jewish Contact”; Dennis Maika “The Struggle for New Amsterdam’s Charter in an Atlantic Context”; Mark Peterson “Cities on the Margins: Boston and New Amsterdam in 1653”; Joyce Goodfriend “Petrus Stuyvesant and the Failed Calvinization of New Amsterdam”; and Martha Shattuck “‘... Back under Obedience to Their High Mightinesses the Lords States General’: From New York to New Orange 1673–1674.”

While making plans for this year’s conference, we decided that the annual dinner should be held in an extraordinary place. What better way to celebrate the City’s 350th birthday than a narrated cruise around lower Manhattan aboard the private yacht Empress? Reservations can be made on our website or by calling the Friends office at 518-486-4815.

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October 25, 2003. “Bread: Staff of Dutch Life in the Old and New World” at the Wyckoff Farmhouse Museum. Food historian Peter G. Rose will explore the meaning of bread in the Dutch colonial world with a slide lecture and open hearth cooking demonstration. 1-4pm, rain or shine. Admission is free. The museum is located on 5816 Clarendon Road at Ralph Avenue, E. Flatbush, Brooklyn, NY 11203. Tel: 718-629-5400; email: info@wyckoffassociation.org.

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News

At the Friends of New Netherland Annual Meeting, President Van Schaick announced the formation of the New Netherland Institute as an unincorporated subsidiary of the Friends of New Netherland, with Dr. Charles Gehring as Executive Director and the Friends’ president as its Executive Secretary. The New Netherland Institute will centralize all auxiliary activities that promote an understanding of the role New Netherland played in the development of America. The Institute will be under Dr. Gehring’s supervision while he continues as chief translator of the New Netherland Project (NNP). Functions and activities of the New Netherland Institute will include:

- Indexing and preparing NNP translations and other materials for publication.
- Organizing the Rensselaerswijck Seminar and meetings.
- Presenting the Hendricks, the Kenney, the Hageman, and other recognitions.
- Developing syllabi for teaching schoolchildren about New Netherland.
- Publishing De Nieu Nederlanse Marcurius and providing a speakers bureau.
- Maintaining the New Netherland Institute web site.
Annual Giving - Donations of private donors, corporations, organizations, foundations and institutions.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all supporters who have generously contributed to the New Netherland Institute. The following list recognizes your gifts received between July 1st, 2002 and June 30th, 2003. Foundations, corporate donors, organizations and institutions appear in italics.

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Aquinas College in Sparkill, NY. For further information go to: www.blauvelt.org.

News from the FNN

The Board of Trustees of the Friends of New Netherland met on Saturday, June 14, 2003 at the Slingerland House in Feura Bush, NY. Much of the meeting was devoted to matters pertaining to the Rensselaerswijck Seminar and the Dinner. Nominating Committee chair and vice-president Charles Wendell reported that Greta Wagle has consented to serve on the Board of Trustees and moved to appoint her to an interim term, effective immediately, until January 2004. The motion was passed unanimously. Ms. Wagle, who for many years has assisted the Project and the Friends, notably in Seminar preparation, administration, and fund raising, presented a detailed proposal for a historical exhibit on Dutch heritage at the State University Plaza Gallery in 2005 or 2006. A motion to support a joint effort of the New Netherland Institute with SUNY Central to mount such an exhibit on Dutch heritage was passed unanimously. Charles Gehring as executive director of the Institute will form a committee.

After lunch about 40 members of the Friends of New Netherland gathered in the living room for the presentation of the Alice P. Kenney Award to Howard L. Funk, volunteer webmaster for the New Netherland Project and the Friends of New Netherland/New Netherland Institute. Established in honor of the distinguished scholar of the early period of American history and the Dutch contribution to American society, this annual Award recognizes significant contributions to colonial Dutch studies. Dr. Charles Gehring, expressed his appreciation for Mr. Funk’s design and maintenance of the website, especially for his creativity and technical support in installing Russell Shorto’s Virtual Tour of New Netherland, an important and educational addition to the site, and for his constant availability to render advice and assistance regarding the Project’s technical issues. John van Schaick, President of the Friends of New Netherland, presented the Award. The ceremony was followed by a reception and the opportunity to tour the Slingerland house—a rare historic treasure. Elisabeth Funk | 7 Diane Court | Katonah, NY | epf@hlfunk.com

Publications

Historian Dr. Joyce D. Goodfriend, who is chair of the Hendricks Award committee and speaker at our Rensselaerswijck Seminar this September, has an article entitled “The Souls of African American Children: New Amsterdam” in the on-line journal called Common-Place. In the article Goodfriend poses the question: “Why would clergymen of the Reformed church use their office to baptize the offspring of men and women claimed as property by the Dutch West India Company, the premier slave-trading company of the 17th century?” To access the article go to www.common-place.org; then simply find Nieuw Amsterdam on the map and click.

Totidem Verbis

As in 2001 our weekend Seminar program will take us to the South Street Seaport Museum for Sunday morning activities. In addition to breakfast at the SSSM and a narrated walk along Wall Street (which is also celebrating its 350th anniversary) we will tour the historic buildings called Schermerhorn Row, which make up a significant part of the SSSM complex. In order to prepare you for the tour, following is an article by Glenn Collins entitled “New Body for a Seaport’s Soul, At Maritime Museum’s Remade Home, Old Walls Talk,” published in the Metro Section of the New York Times, July 3, 2003. [Special thanks to our Friend Richard Mooney for making this reprint possible.]

Call it the city’s original world trade center. Nearly two centuries ago, the merchant Peter Schermerhorn began constructing a row of commercial buildings in a speculative Fulton Street development that was to house Manhattan’s first collection of traders, importers and counting houses only steps away from the city’s busiest piers.

Now those original Federal style brick commercial buildings of Schermerhorn Row as well as tantalizing, venerable remnants of the thriving businesses that inhabited them are being reclaimed as components of a $21 million new South Street Seaport Museum complex. Construction crews are toiling to make the buildings’ hidden spaces and artifacts visible to the public for the first time when the museum opens this fall. Peter Neill, president of the museum, said it would display “not only firsthand evidence of the maritime enterprise that built American trade, but also the acculturation process for immigrants, which established the diversity of our population.” Thomas Bender, professor of history at New York University, said that in the early 1800’s, the seaport was nothing less
than “the heart of a worldwide trading
empire,” adding, “It’s fair to say that New
York’s economy was born there.”

The riverward wharves of Schermer-
horn Row were not only important to New
York, but also the nation, because in those
pre-income-tax days, Professor Bender
said, the customs tariffs paid at New
York’s port were “supplying 70 percent of
the national income by the time of the
Civil War.”

The new museum space, between
Front and South Streets on Fulton Street,
will offer salt-scented breezes and views
of the harbor, and more important, walls
and windows that were witnesses to the
city’s vibrant maritime saga.

Only yards from the Schermerhorn
buildings, with their handmade bricks and
raked slate roofs, the first American ships
sailed to China to open trade. Whalers and
warehouses. Hoists and elevators have
seen original mercantile offices, lofts and
rooms and offices in what Mr. Beyer said
were “the mercantile high-rise buildings
of their day.”

Mr. Neill said the goal was not to tear
out the soul of the old structures to create
exhibition space. “Like our sailing ships,
the buildings themselves are artifacts,” he
said, “and we didn’t want to turn them
into white boxes.”

The museum’s circuitous exhibition
route on upper floors was the answer to a
real-estate conundrum. The arrangement
of the Rouse Company with New York
City gave the developer the rights to the
retail space in most of the Seaport’s
ground floors and second floors, so the
museum was carved out above.

The museum raised money for the new
galleries from donors like the Starr Foun-
dation, the J. Aron Charitable Foundation,
Goldman Sachs and the Port Authority of
New York and New Jersey, and won a
$5.3 million construction grant from the
New York City Economic Development
Corporation. The museum is also raising
an additional $20 million for an eventual
six-story extension adjacent to the mu-
seum at the corner of South and John
Streets.

In the congeries of rooms in the new
museum — at points the space is barely
seven feet high — visitors will be able to
see original mercantile offices, lofts and
warehouses. Hoists and elevators have
been preserved. Charred beams and
scorched ceilings will serve as lessons on
the prevalence of fire in early maritime
businesses.

Visitors will also be able to see the
original chimneys, door frames, plaster
walls and wallpaper — all of it greatly de-
composed by time — of the Fulton Ferry
Hotel, the one made famous in Joseph
Mitchell’s “Up in the Old Hotel,” first
written for The New Yorker.

“We’re leaving this as a ruin,” Mr.
Neill said, “leaving it inhabited by the
ghosts of immigrants and sailors and
young women just off the boat.”

In the hotel, visitors will be able to
view rooms where generations of immi-
grant girls attended to the laundry, and wit-
tness some startling examples of
workingmen’s graffiti, like the signature
of one William Sinclair from Sept. 16,
1847.

But the Lascaux cave of Schermerhorn
graffiti is a 10-foot-wide by 8-foot-tall
relic in the former Bennett & Becker tea
and coffee importing company. Under old
cell wall, workers found 130-year-old
graffiti written in Gaelic, displaying the
words to a popular revolutionary song, the
drawing of a Gaelic harp, and a caricature
of the owner, James P. Bennett.

“This is quite a discovery,” Mr. Neill
said, “because we’ve so far been unable to
find any actual portrait of Bennett for our
exhibition.”

A crucial element of the reconstruction
has been the replacement of original rotted
floors. More than 200,000 square feet
of ancient pine boards rescued in Massa-
chusetts by the Mountain Lumber Com-
pany of Ruckersville, Va., are being
installed. “It contributes to the museum’s
authenticity, replicating the original floor-
ing, “ said Willie Drake, the company’s
president.

Not unlike the immigrants who origi-
nally worked in the same warehouse
room, one of the floor installers, Terence
Chow, is also a new American — he ar-
ived from Burma in 1972. The installa-
tion of the boards is challenging because
“the floor is so uneven,” he said on a re-
cent afternoon, pointing to the eccen-
trically settled old walls.

“It makes you seasick just looking at
it,” he added, smiling. “The original work-
ers had it easier.”

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