The person of Kiliaen van Rensselaer, founder of the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck, has fascinated historians of different generations and even today still excites the imagination. Perhaps it is exactly the paradoxical element in Van Rensselaer’s career that intrigues us so much. Here is a great propagandist for colonization of North America who himself never set foot on American soil; a sly merchant who gathered a fortune in Holland in a short time, but invested thousands of guilders in an American patroonship, which yielded him hardly a dime. And what about a man with an open eye for the great possibilities of modern agriculture, who at the same time acquired a manor with subordinate tenants, but who looked—in the eyes of some observers—like a feudal baron, driven by the profit motive?

Former authors have not been able to resist the tendency to put one or some aspects of Van Rensselaer’s complicated personality in the middle, and in so doing have sketched a sometimes one-sided picture of the man who has been of invaluable importance for the settlement of the northern Hudson valley in the seventeenth century.

Nissenson, author of the standard work on Rensselaerswijck, The Patroon’s Domain, thought that agriculture and colonization were only pretenses for Van Rensselaer and other great shareholders of the Dutch West India Company in order to be able to extort patroonships from the Company. In so doing they could—according to Nissenson—fasten their hold on the fur trade.1

At the other end of the spectrum we find the Dutchman Jessurun who, in his book about the patroon published in 1917, sketches an idyllic picture of Van Rensselaer as a selfless idealist who only in the very last place thought of his own profit.2 To form a correct assessment of Van Rensselaer’s importance for the development of the area around present-day Albany we must see the establishment of patroonships in relation to the close tie between trade and agriculture in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. In the last few decades several historians have shown that commercial agriculture in the northern Low Countries formed a solid base for the economic expansion in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.3

In this way we will get a more balanced picture not only of Van Rensselaer’s motives, but also of the results of his American undertaking. And if we want to judge the results of his agricultural experiment, we must know what concrete expectations Kiliaen van Rensselaer had of his patroonship. In what follows I will try to find an answer to these questions. Successively, Van Rensselaer’s motives, his profit expectations, and the real results of his agriculture will be treated.

Whoever occupies himself with Kiliaen van Rensselaer’s career, soon comes across his origin in the Veluwe. It is true, Kiliaen van Rensselaer was born in the small town of Hasselt, in Overijssel, but he descended from a family who named themselves after the estate Rensselaer between Nijkerk and Putten, on the western fringe of the Veluwe. Kiliaen still had some possessions there. It is out of the question—as it was sometimes suggested in the past—that the first patroon should be of noble descent.4 The Rensselaer possession was an estate like many others in these regions. At this time the Veluwe was still called the wild and barren country,5 and the wilderness in the middle of it was hardly inhabited. Agriculture provided only a slender existence.

At a young age Kiliaen van Rensselaer was boarded out with a relative, Wolfert van Bijler, who had a jeweller’s firm in Amsterdam. This Van Bijler had commercial relations far across the borders of the Dutch Republic. In 1608 Kiliaen handled Van Bijler’s affairs at the court of Rudolf II in Prague. Some years later he carried on trade for himself as Kiliaen van Rensselaer and Co. This firm later merged with the business house of Johan van Wely to the firm of Jan van Wely and Co,
which had a capital of 192,000 Dutch florins. Van Rensselaer contributed one eighth to it. For our subject it is of importance that as early as 1620 Van Rensselaer appeared to be concerned with land reclamation, namely in the Gooi. Eight years later in this region he became the owner of the estate Crailo near Huizen, which to a great extent consisted of unclaimed land. One year before, in December 1627, he had married as his second wife Anna van Wely, the daughter of his deceased partner. This marriage probably strongly enlarged Van Rensselaer's trading capital, especially considering that Anna's father, who was Prince Maurits's court jeweller, was known to be very rich. Like so many merchants of his time Van Rensselaer must have considered the opening of wilderness regions in his native country as a favorable possibility for investment and perhaps his descent from the Veluwe contributed to the fact that he directed himself also to the less fertile and sandy soil of the Gooi. These two aspects: his knowledge of farming on the Veluwe and his connections with reclamations on the 'difficult' soil of the Gooi are—in my opinion—of essential importance if one wants to understand Van Rensselaer's aims with his American patronship.

Van Rensselaer's relations with the Dutch West India Company date from the very first beginning of this commercial undertaking. Whoever reviews the history of New Netherland from 1624 to 1630 gets the impression that the colony, begun so hopefully, was more or less forgotten by the Company after some years. Maybe the defeat in Brazil and the first disappointments in New Netherland had called for caution, and the Company directors tightened the purse strings. According to Van Rensselaer the colony was grossly neglected by the Company. The fact that it took a number of years to cultivate sufficient land in order to make the colony self-supporting, was not reckoned with. Insufficient supplies were sent to the colonists, so that they were compelled to barter merchandise against food with the Indians, as a result of which the Company suffered great losses. Besides, they had neglected to replace promptly the cattle that had died. Another cause of the problems the first colonists confronted was—according to Van Rensselaer—the bad connection with the fatherland. Not three small ships, but one big ship should have been sent yearly.

Even when taking the view that the Company only aimed at making New Netherland self-supporting by establishing a limited number of farms (the twelve that were originally planned at Manhattan), the colony cannot be considered successful by 1630. By the gloomy tidings that were coming in from North America the contrast between supporters and opponents of colonization was further driven to extremes. Supporters were especially to be found among the commissioners for New Netherland in the Chamber of Amsterdam of the Dutch West India Company. Van Rensselaer was their most important spokesman; to his faction belonged among others: Samuel Godijn, Samuel Blommaert, Hendrik Hamel, Pieter Evertsen Hulft, Jonas Witsen, Johannes de Laet and Michiel Pauw. Both within the Amsterdam Chamber and in the Heren XIX this group was confronted with fierce resistance of those who put the profits of the fur trade first.

If we can rely on Van Rensselaer's communications, there was little patience with New Netherland in the Chamber of Amsterdam. The guilt for the course of events in North America was entirely fastened on the commissioners for New Netherland. The commissioners and great shareholders soon realized that nothing was to be expected from the Company as regards colonization and they made proposals to take up that colonization at their own cost, in exchange for certain privileges.

The discussion about these things took place in the first months of 1628. If we assume that the situation in the colony must have been discussed in Amsterdam then, as it was in the fall of 1627, scarcely two years after the great shipment of colonists and cattle, it becomes clear that conclusions were very quickly drawn about the slight success of the American territory. If we are to believe Van Rensselaer, the conflict about the way in which New Netherland ought to be exploited dated already from before 1624, and the first settlement had been the result of his efforts. When the opponents got wind of the first setbacks, which had to be absorbed at Manhattan, they "gave the dog a bad name and hung him." The opponents especially disliked Van Rensselaer's proposal to curtail the fur trade somewhat, simultaneously with the colonization, lest the Indian hunters in the colony's hinterland destroy the supply of beavers. Perhaps Van Rensselaer had the misfortune that the setbacks at Manhattan coincided with a collapse of the fur trade, which was not the result of a careful policy as Van Rensselaer advocated, but of a war between the Mohawk and the Mahican in the northern Hudson Valley, which came to an end only in 1629.

Piet Hein's conquest of the Spanish silver fleet in 1628 must have contributed to the fact that the attention
Fig. 51. Title page of "Vryheden," published 1630.
Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, New York City.
of Directors and chief participants of the Company again was directed to rich Brazil, and that they willingly left the experiment with settlement and agriculture in their North American colony to some private people.

At last in 1629, after long preparations, a charter was drawn up, in which a number of attractive conditions for settlement was offered to private founders of colonies. After an earlier design, in which the fur trade was prohibited to the future patroons met with fierce resistance of the chief participants, the stipulation appeared in the charter of 1629, that the patroons were allowed to carry on the fur trade in places where the Company had no agent, at a recognition fee of one guilder per skin.

Those who populated a certain territory with fifty people within a time span of four years would be acknowledged as patroons. The patroons were free in the choice of their territory; only Manhattan was excluded. They did not get the right of ownership by itself; where necessary they were to purchase it from the local Indians. But by registering a territory as a patroonship, the patroons laid down their claims. Those claims could not be impaired by anybody when they complied with the conditions of the Freedoms and Exemptions, as the charter was called. The maximum size of their territory would be four miles along the coast or along one side of a river, or two miles along both sides of a river.

Within this territory the patroons had the lower, middle and higher legal jurisdiction, provided that for all legal proceedings of more than 50 guilders one had the right to appeal to Director and Council of New Netherland. The colonists and goods the patroons wanted to send to America by ship, would be taken in the ships at a reasonable rate. Cattle and agricultural implements would even be transported free, at least as far as the Company had room in its ships.

In order to have the disposal of a patroonship by last will, special consent was required, the so-called venia testandi. It would lead too far afield to go into the different articles of the Freedoms and Exemptions here. Notably Van Grol studied the charter in De grondpolitiek in het Westindische domein der Generaliteit. Erroneously, in my opinion, several authors have emphasized the anachronistic character of the patroonships. De Roever for instance assumed that according to the charter the affairs in New Netherland were largely arranged in a "medieval spirit." Nissenson thought that it concerned a "retrogression from the stage which political development had attained in the Netherlands." According to Condon the Freedoms and Exemptions were "quite anachronistic in the far from feudal condition of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century." Were the patroonships really at right angles to the political and judicial conditions found in the Dutch Republic? When we take the situation in the province of Holland as standard, the answer must be yes. Fiefs had practically died out in that part of the Netherlands, Kiliaen van Rensselaer himself wrote in a letter to Johannes de Laet. In the same letter however, Van Rensselaer said that conditions in Utrecht and Gelderland were quite different. His own estates near Nijkerk on the Veluwe were held as fiefs from the Lady of Etten and the Abbot of Paderborn, both places in present-day Germany. Condon asserted that Van Rensselaer had "no working knowledge of the system of feudalism." In light of the above-mentioned letter this proposition seems untenable. The patroonships were in first instance meant as a form of exploitation of unreclaimed territories in the colonies: the patroons had to lay open wilderness regions. In this connection it is of importance that also about this time in the wilderness regions of the Dutch Republic large plots of land were granted as manors. We find a clear example in the province of Drenthe, where the Provincial Estates presented the manor of Dieverder, Leggelder and Snijder moors to Grand Pensionary Adriaan Pauw on 19 February 1633. The creation of a new manor apparently was not frowned upon in the "Golden Age of the Low Countries!" Just like the patroons in New Netherland. Adriaan Pauw acquired high, middle and low jurisdiction of his new domain and he also obtained tax exemption for his colonists for twenty years.

In the charter area of the West India Company, the patroonships were not unique either. The Zeeland Chamber had proclaimed a charter of Freedoms for the South American coast even before the foundation of the North American patroonships. It would serve as a basis for the New Netherland Freedoms of 1628 and 1629.

In the territory of New Netherland after the proclamation of the Freedoms and Exemptions, five patroonships were initially registered. Samuel Godijn and Albert Coenraats Burgh had their claims laid down on territories at the South River (Delaware); Samuel Blommert intended to establish a colony at the Fresh River (Connecticut), while Kiliaen van Rensselaer and others had a patroonship registered around Fort Orange. Finally, at the beginning of 1630, Michiel Pauw declared himself...
The arguments pro and con this proposition were once more arranged by Van Cleaf Bachman in his book *Peltries and Plantations*. He comes to the conclusion that Nissenson’s accusation at any rate cannot be proved. Though I cannot go into Nissenson’s proposition here in much detail, I will still put forward some arguments against his position. To begin with, in my opinion Van Rensselaer’s personal involvement in agriculture on the Veluwe and in reclamations in the Gooi have not always been appreciated properly. Moreover there are Van Rensselaer’s own remarks about the matter in his correspondence. He wrote thus to his schout Jacob Planck on the 24th of May, 1635:

_The Lord will bless our undertaking as we have a much better object than the Company in this matter, since we seek to populate the country and in course of time by many people to propagate the teaching of the Holy Gospel, while they on the contrary, employing only a few people, seek only the profits of the fur trade and largely deceive themselves, as these profits are still accompanied by losses._

Whoever wants to see a thorough hypocrite in Van Rensselaer, will perhaps not be convinced by the above. Van Rensselaer was known as a clever businessman and therefore exactly the arguments of economic nature outweigh all others. As appears from his letters, the patroon thought that agriculture could be a very profitable business. On each morgen of land, slightly more than two acres, every year three quarters to one last of wheat could be produced, Van Rensselaer estimated, the last corresponding to 82.5 bushels. Each last would bring the patroon 140 guilders. Van Rensselaer had purchased 2500 acres of cultivated land from the Indians. Only a few dozen farmers would be needed to utilize this land. With the greater part under cultivation, these 2500 acres would then be able to yield about 100,000 guilders annually at three quarters of a last per morgen: far more than the revenues of the New Netherland fur trade. His principal profits however, the patroon stated, would come from cattle.

That these calculations were no more than a beautiful mirage we shall further see. Here it is sufficient to establish that, according to his own calculations, agriculture alone in his own patroonship, and certainly in the long run, simply yielded much more money than the trade in beaver furs. It is a pity that Nissenson in *The Patroon’s Domain*, which is considered as the standard book on early Rensselaerswijck, has not taken these considerations into his argument. That Van Rensselaer had agriculture in mind in the first place, I think is shown by the foregoing.

Van Rensselaer’s hopes ran high when in 1630 he sent a first group of colonists to his American possession. Rumors about the great fertility of the region around Fort Orange had been coming in for years. In a letter of 1628 the region had been called “astonishingly fertile and pleasant.” After the war between the Mohawk and the Mahican, Van Rensselaer had found the latter willing to sell a considerable area of land to him. It consisted of about 2500 acres of arable land, on which the Indians had cultivated primarily maize. In the same letter of 1632 in which the patroon had predicted that every acre would produce 29 to 39 bushels, he compared the quality of his new domain with the farmland in the Betuwe and the Beemster, two very fertile regions in the Dutch Republic.

Now let us see if Van Rensselaer’s sweet dreams came true. Although the data on the agricultural production in the patroonship are scanty, they nevertheless speak for themselves. On the farms of Broer Cornelis and Gerrit de Reux in 1638 the grain, wheat as well as oats, was estimated at 11 bushels per acre. In 1644, a very good harvest year, the grain in the fields of Brant Peelen’s farm on Castle Island, which was taken over that year by Cornelis Segers, was also estimated at 11 bushels per acre. Now observe that this was a good grain year, as is demonstrated by the tithe returns of the patroonship! But there were even lower yields. On the farm of Pieter Teunisz in 1649 only 8 bushels per acre were produced. If we compare these data with other data on yields in colonial America we see the following. According to the anonymous author of *American Husbandry* a yield of 20 to 30 bushels per acre in the region around Albany was usual. H.P. Hedrick, writer of the *History of Agriculture in the State of New York*, states that 10 bushels per acre were considered a good yield. In these different data we probably see reflected the difference between older and higher grounds, and the fertile soil in the valleys of the Hudson and Mohawk that was flooded now and then.
However it may have been, even the rather high yields of *American Husbandry* are far below the expectations of Kiliaen van Rensselaer. 20 to 30 bushels an acre against 29 to 39 bushels an acre!

It may be clear, that the patroon was very disappointed. While he presumably had in mind a modern type of husbandry, as in some parts of the Dutch Republic, the yields of his American farms resembled those of late medieval England. But let us not forget that Van Rensselaer's expectations were extremely high, even for European standards. On a non-specialized farm like that of the Englishman Robert Loder, south of Oxford, with a rather modern type of management, between 1612 and 1620 there were harvest of 14 to 50 bushels per acre, while the average was just over 27 bushels. Yields of this kind in England and the Low Countries perhaps were no exception, but it is not very likely that they were very general either. Even just before the middle of the past century in the Dutch marine-clay regions the average harvest was 21 bushels of winter wheat and 36 bushels of oats per acre.

The disappointing results of farming in the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck are also in great contrast to the enthusiastic stories that travelers took back home from New Netherland and the colony of New York. According to the Swede Peter Kalm, who visited the region in 1750, the wheat around Albany was the best of North America, that of the Esopus region—now Kingston—excluded. The eighteenth-century historian William Smith went even further and stated that the islands in the Hudson near Albany contained probably the best soil in the world. Adriaen van der Donck, who himself lived some time in Rensselaerswijck, also spoke highly of the fertility of these regions. In his *Beschrijvinghe van Nieuw Nederland* he mentions a tenant in the patroonship, whose name was Brant Peelen, who succeeded in growing wheat on the same piece of ground eleven years in succession without manuring or fallowing but with good results. Van der Donck must have known Brant Peelen very well, for both had their farms on Castle Island, and so they were neighbors. Yet this story does not originally come from Van der Donck. We already encounter it in the journal of David Pietersz de Vries, who stayed for a few weeks in Rensselaerswijck in 1640. In this version of the story, Peelen had even cultivated his land for twelve years in succession without manure or falling. This means that either Peelen or De Vries exaggerated. For Brant Peelen only arrived in New Netherland in 1630, and could not possibly have grown wheat on his land longer than eleven years when De Vries visited the patroonship.

For a better understanding of agriculture in Rensselaerswijck we need to investigate the factors that led to the disappointing grain yields. Unfortunately we can only reconstruct the real situation hypothetically; no sources are available that give us a direct insight into the causes of the low yields in Van Rensselaer's American domain.

The lowlands along the Hudson River were flooded once or twice a year, sometimes to the great loss of cattle, grain and buildings. In the process, fertile mud was deposited on the low-lying lands to great advantage of farming. Exactly this fertile mud made the soil very suitable to arable farming. The Dutch immigrants, used to lands that had been cultivated for centuries, must have been stunned by the fertility and the extent of this country.

The yearly floodings and the big harvests of the first years must have dangled the illusion of an inexhaustible soil before their eyes. Van der Donck states that during his nine years stay in New Netherland he never saw a farmer manuring his land! To maintain the fertility now and then a year of rest was inserted. For the very reason that in Rensselaerswijck almost nothing but grain was grown, the pressure upon the fertility of the soil was very great here. Especially the colonists of the second generation were confronted with the ill effects of this exhaustive land use. These symptoms of course were not restricted to Rensselaerswijck or the Hudson Valley. Within thirty years after the first farmers had settled along the Delaware, there were signs of a decline in soil fertility. On most farms within a radius of 40 miles around Philadelphia, the average yield dropped from 20 to 30 bushels per acre to 10 bushels and even less.

Naturally, the neglect of manuring must have had disastrous effects on the production results in Rensselaerswijck. After twenty years we see more frequently a special prescription regarding the manuring of the land in the lease contracts:

And during the first years of his lease, he shall spread the manure over the land and cut down or kill the trees which stand in the way.

The fact that most tenants leased their farm for a limited number of years, will not have stimulated them to maintain the fertility of the soil for a next generation
of tenants. The final result of a neglect of manure and fallowing that had been going on for dozens of years, we
find in a letter of Jeremias van Rensselaer of July 1668, which gives an account of the miserable state of the
patroonship:

The worst of it all is that the land is so neglected and moreover so full of weeds that one hardly knows where to get seed grain and that hardly one-half of our grain can be sent over any more, for it is impossible to get the tares out of it, or out of the land, for summer fallowing does not help. Some of the farmers produce crops which consist for more than one-half of tares.

The neglect of manure and fallowing explains the exhaustion of the soil after a considerable number of years, but it does not tell us why already in 1638 on farms that were only established for a short time the yields were so low.

Another important problem of agriculture in Rensselaerswijck and New Netherland was the methods that were used in clearing the land. A thorough clearing of the wilderness, in which trees and shrubs with their roots were removed completely, was a very great and labor intensive job. Given the shortage of farmhands in New Netherland, the people for such work simply were lacking. Therefore the clearing methods of the Indians were used. To work new land, the native Americans used predominantly two methods. On set times, mostly in the fall, trees and shrubs were set on fire. Secondly—and this presumably was the most important method—the bark of the trees was removed just above the ground, so that the trees died slowly. The trunks of the trees that remained, stayed in the ground, and among them the land was worked with a hoe. This so-called “girdling method” had some advantages: it was labor saving, the humus was not touched, and the dead trees that fell were uprooted, so that they were easier to dig out.

Apart from these advantages, there were some serious disadvantages. Yields were lower as long as the trunks were in the ground, plowing the land was sometimes difficult, and there was the danger of falling branches. Meinig describes this clearing method as follows:

American colonists had long ago learned the futility of trying to create clean cleared fields immediately. And so stumps and roots and great logs were left encumbering the ground until eliminated by rotting and repeated burnings... clearing was slow and enormously laborious...

To what extent this way of clearing the land was also used in Rensselaerswijck we do not know. Bidwell and Falconer state that the method was generally used by colonists. There is clear evidence that at least the burning of bushes was not unknown in Rensselaerswijck.

Arent van Curler, who in 1643 founded a large farm called De Vlakte, north of Fort Orange, complained about the many roots and stumps that were hidden in the ground that were discovered not before the plough hit them. He had sown 20 to 24 acres with oats, but without the roots in the ground, it would have been much more. He probably was not the only one who encountered these problems; most of the land that was worked by the patron’s tenants was the former maize fields of Indians. It is not impossible that in some cases Dutch farmers also sowed wheat and oats among the trees, as we know about the Swedish colonists on the Delaware. The article in a number of lease contracts that were made up in Rensselaerswijck during the 1650s, in which the tenants were obliged to cut down or kill the trees that stood in the way, indicates that the Dutch farmers initially were very lax about trees. It is interesting to note that the above-mentioned lease contracts did not pertain to new farms, but to longer existing ones, like the one on Castle Island. While the method of only superficially clearing the land, by which roots stayed in the ground, was very suited to the exacting cultivation of corn by the Indians, who after exhaustion of the ground took up their belongings and started over somewhere else, and moreover did not use a horse-drawn plough, this clearing method was disastrous to the Dutch farmers.

For a number of years we are able to reconstruct which crops were grown in Rensselaerswijck. The tithe results of the years 1642 through 1646 give us a fairly accurate picture of the relative importance of the main crops. At least in this period there was a heavy preponderance of oats (50.8%) and wheat (42.7%). Barley (7.8%), buckwheat (1.7%), peas (1.2%) and rye (0.8%) played only minor roles. The prices of wheat and oats generally were in the ratio of 5 to 2, so in fact wheat was the leading crop in the patronship. It goes without saying that in respect to the crops that were cultivated, Rensselaerswijck in no way resembled the densely populated areas of the Low Countries. There exactly the “non-grains” gradually took up more space. While the Netherlands for their food supply had made themselves almost entirely dependent on the Baltic region, we see in the American colony a one-sided directedness towards the cultivation of grains. Although leguminous plants did not take up much space in the patronship, they were cultivated at eight out of ten farms that paid tithes...
between 1642 and 1646. Peas and beans were especially important in adding nitrogen to the ground and so restoring fertility. This quality made them very suited to grow during the fallow.

Kiliaen van Rensselaer seems to have been well aware of the soil-restoring function of a number of crops. In 1632 he sent rape seed to his colony, and he was also interested in the growing of clover, that was also cultivated on his estate Crailo in the Gooi. It seems doubtful if there was ever any cultivation of clover in the patroonship on more than a very modest scale. Even in 1659 white clover seed had to be sent again to the patroonship from Holland.

The commercial orientation of the agriculture the first patroon envisaged in his domain, is shown by the history of hops and especially tobacco in the colony. Neither of these crops were a smashing success. Here again the patroon was inclined to believe in huge profits that never materialized. Every morgen was to produce about 6000 pounds of tobacco. According to Roessingh in his dissertation on tobacco culture in the Dutch Republic, even the best crop never amounted to more than one third of this.

Problems in making tobacco culture pay were the fact that many tobacco planters preferred quantity to quality, which had a negative impact on the market price, and—in connection with this—the lack of cheap labor.

The first patroon's expectations of arable farming in his American colony were only surpassed by his hope that livestock farming would bring in even larger profits. In the first decades this did, in fact, become the most successful part of his enterprise. But here again the patroon did not reckon with the specific circumstances of New Netherland like the less nutritious grasses and the heavy losses by floods, wolves and Indians.

But in spite of this, Rensselaerswijck already at an early date became known as horse country. The average number of horses was slightly more than seven per farm in 1651. In this respect, Rensselaerswijck ranked high in colonial farming: the average number of horses in Massachusetts and Connecticut was much lower, while horses were even very scarce in Maryland. Only in southeastern Pennsylvania did the number of horses in the early eighteenth-century almost equal that of the Dutch patroonship.

From 1643 on, conscious efforts were made to raise good horses in the patroonship. Until that time breeding had taken place completely uncontrolled, as most of the horses freely roamed around. How important horse breeding rapidly became appears from the inventory of farms in 1651. By then 42% of the horses in Rensselaerswijck consisted of young animals (three years and younger), which compares to 21% in southeastern Pennsylvania from 1713 to 1716, and 33% from 1728 to 1737 in the same region. In particular, De Vlaakte, the farm established by Arent van Curler in 1643, functioned as a stud farm. The number of cows per farm in the patroonship was more like that in other places: they numbered 7.6 in Rensselaerswijck (1651) and 8.1 in the Dutch villages on Long Island (1676). But compared to the Dutch republic there were only few cows per farm in Rensselaerswijck. Even in the regions where arable farming was predominant, the average number of cattle was considerably higher than in the American domain. This of course is not hard to understand. The densely populated Republic with its big towns provided an easily accessible market for meat and dairy products, while intensive husbandry could use large quantities of manure.

The relative success of livestock farming, however, was not enough to make up for the meager results of arable farming. Only after dozens of years things changed for the better in the patroonship and the first patroon did not live to witness this.

As elsewhere in New York, the scarcity of labor was an impediment to the development of agriculture. Although the wage structure of New Netherland has never been the object of serious study, we can derive some information from the sources about the wages that were paid to farm servants in Rensselaerswijck. We know the annual wages of 49 farmhands, all excluding food and board.

Given the state of knowledge of wages in the Dutch Republic it is difficult to compare New Netherland wages to those in the fatherland. We know that 30 to 50 guilders per year was normal for resident farmhands in seventeenth-century Friesland. Wages in the province of Holland were possibly much higher, but sufficient detailed evidence is lacking. Those farmhands that were hired in New Netherland could earn much more than their countrymen who—unaware of their position on the American labor market—hired themselves out in Amsterdam to farmers across the Atlantic. We know of annual wages in Schenectady that reached 272 to 300 guilders in 1663.
More important are the daily wages, reflecting more clearly the relation between supply and demand on the New Netherland labor market. In this field also the patroon had tried to fix the wages from his Amsterdam residence, originally at 15 stivers, later at 30 stivers a day, but in reality in Rensselaerswijck widely varying wages were paid, which were generally higher than Van Rensselaer had in mind.\textsuperscript{72}

Around mid-17th century, farm work in the province of Holland paid 15 to 20 stivers.\textsuperscript{73} In 1648 threshing and clearing of grain in the patroonship paid 40 stivers, harvesting in New Amsterdam in 1653 and 1656 up to 50 stivers.\textsuperscript{74} The gap in the wage levels is also shown by the daily wages of carpenters. Carpenter’s work paid around 25 stivers in Alkmaar (Holland), from 50 to 80 stivers in New Netherland.\textsuperscript{75} The numerous complaints of farmers about the high wages do not surprise us. In 1648 the patroon was even obliged to include in the lease contracts the condition that if the tenants could not be provided with enough farmhands in summer they were released from paying tithes.\textsuperscript{76} Finally a partial solution was found by the introduction of black slaves into the patroonship. At least eight slaves are known to have been imported into the patroonship between 1644 and 1664, but a closer study of the accounts in the Van Rensselaer Manor papers at Albany may reveal a larger number.\textsuperscript{77}

On the 7 October 1643 in the house The Crossed Heart at Amsterdam’s celebrated Keizersgracht, Kiliaen van Rensselaer died at the age of 56 or 57. In the thirteen years that had gone by since he first sent colonists to his new American domain, he had experienced nothing but disappointments from his patroonship. But in the two decades following his death the situation in Rensselaerswijck would grow even worse. The domain never expanded to more than about 18 farms around 1652 with about 1000 acres of cultivated land.\textsuperscript{78} Apart from setbacks in agriculture itself, the bad course of events culminated in the separation of both the village of Beverwijck and the settlement of Catskill from the domain. Given the extreme disparity between Van Rensselaer’s sweet dreams and the harsh reality of low yields and declining fertility of the soil, we can now look at the consequences this had for the living conditions of the tenants and their rent performance in particular. I will not at this place try to repeat the discussion about the position of the colonial tenant that was engendered a number of years ago on the occasion of the new insights put forward by Prof. Sung Bok Kim, especially in his stimulating book \textit{Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York. Manorid Society, 1664–1775}. It must have come as a considerable shock to a lot of readers of his book that the tenants on the great manors of 18th century New York were not the oppressed and impoverished class of semi-serfs, sighing under a heavy load of feudal obligations, they were always taken for. The New York tenant of Frederick Jackson Turner, Mark, Ellis, Billington and others, Kim replaced by an almost independent tenant who was in an advantageous position with respect to his landlord.

But apart from his conclusions, we can learn a lot from Kim’s method. Instead of only looking at the form and content of the lease contracts, as was done by earlier generations of historians, we must now closely study the daily practice of tenancy.\textsuperscript{79} Of course it would be too simple, just to equate the tenants of the great manors after 1664, with the Rensselaerswijck tenants of the Dutch period. In fact, when looking at the relation between patron and tenant before 1664, apart from some similarities, some notable differences strike us.

The first settlers in the patroonship had to be attracted by paying them yearly wages. As soon as possible, Kiliaen van Rensselaer introduced a form of sharecropping. From 1632 on, when the patroon leased a farm to Gerrit de Reux and took half the produce of his farm as rent, this was the dominating type of lease for about a decade.\textsuperscript{80} After a short period, in which lease contracts were also made reserving one third of the produce for the patroon, money rent was introduced in Rensselaers-
Wijck. The first contracts of this kind date from 1646 and 1647. With money rents, something strange was going on in the patroonship. The lease sum was set on a certain amount of money, but this amount had to be paid in kind. For instance a tenant had to pay an annual rent of 500 guilders in wheat or oats. The prices of wheat and oats however, were fixed in this matter. So in fact this was not money rent, but a kind of so-called seed rent. The quantity of grain that had to be paid as rent did not vary with the crops. For the tenant seed rent was more attractive than sharecropping. The two were equal in entirely putting the risk of the crop on the lessee, but the seed rent put only a part of the price risk on the tenant. In Rensselaerswijck after 1648 all remaining sharecroppers became tenants on seed rent. The lease term varied widely from four to sometimes twelve years. Perpetual lease was not introduced before the English takeover of New Netherland.

Here we touch on the most striking difference between the eighteenth-century manors and Dutch Rensselaerswijck. The tenants in early Rensselaerswijck missed the feeling of security and semi-independence their 18th-century successors enjoyed. As a result, they lacked the incentives to improve their holdings. At the end of the period, many farms were in a state of decay. Another striking difference between the great Hudson Valley manors of colonial New York and the Dutch patroonship is the size of the holdings. The average farm in 1651 measured about 57 acres. In the period between 1730 and 1783 the tenant holdings in Rensselaerswijck averaged 153 acres.

We do not yet have sufficient data on all the details of the debits and credits of an average Rensselaerswijck farm around mid-century. Nevertheless, the general picture is clear. With an average yield ratio ranging from 1:12 to 1:15 and an irregular income from dairy products, fruit, meat, vegetables and incidental horse sales, most of the farms simply did not yield enough to meet all the expenses. Besides the annual rent these expenses consisted of a tithe, some fowl or labor service for the patroon and the wages of about two farmhands. Then there were of course the costs involved in keeping cattle through the winter and the consumption of a household of about five persons.

It seems clear that for many farmers having a few grown sons was of the utmost importance in keeping down the costs. There were huge rent arrears in the patroonship, and their cause is easy to see: for many farmers not paying their annual rents was simply the only remaining solution. They did not refuse to pay “out of sheer wealth” as the first patroon had stated, but because their small holdings hardly provided a meager subsistence. The patroons lacked the means to put the screws more tightly to their tenants. The only one that tried to follow a hard line was director Brant van Slichtenhorst, who from 1648 to 1652 managed the affairs of the patroon in Rensselaerswijck. As was to be expected, every time he tried to confiscate money or grain he met with fierce resistance.

Before the end of the Dutch period, many tenants had left the patroonship to become small but independent freeholders in the new agricultural communities in the valleys of the Hudson and Mohawk rivers. For the patroons, tenants were not easy to be had. Those tenants that remained, paid as little rent as the leaseholders in eighteenth-century New York.

Kim’s argumentum e silentio: the tenants did not leave the manors, so they were reasonably well off, does not hold for the patroonship of Rensselaerswijck before 1664. The tenants did leave, and so they obviously thought of a better life somewhere else.
Notes

4W. de Vries has refuted this argument in “De Van Rensselaers in Nederland” in: De Nederlandsche Leeuw, LXVI (1949), 162–165. The position that the Van Rensselaers were of noble descent was taken by N. de Roever “Kiliaen van Rensselaer en zijne kolonie Rensselaerswyck” in: Oud Holland, VIII (1890), 31; Jessurun, Kiliaan van Rensselaer, 24; and W.J. Hoffman, “Notes on the pre-American genealogy of the Van Rensselaer family with notes on the Van Wencum, Pafraet, Van Byler and Van Wely families; ancestral lines of the Van Rensselaer family in America” in: New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, LXXI (1940), 130.
5Literally, wilt en byster landt van Veluwen. The interpretation of these words have led to some misunderstandings about the character of the Veluwe in late medieval and early modern times. The often quoted text originates in a charter of 1432 by Duke Arnold of Gelderland. It has been used time and again to illustrate the desolate character of the region. For a discussion of the meaning of these words cf. B.H. Sticher van Bath “Studien betreffende de agrarische geschiedenis van de Veluwe in de Middeleeuwen” in: Bijdragen tot de agrarische geschiedenis (Utrecht/Amsterdam, 1978) 213. In my opinion ‘wild and barren’ may be applied rightfully to the central part of the region, that even to this day is thinly populated.
6De Roever, “Kiliaen van Rensselaer en zijne kolonie Rensselaerswyck,” 37.
9Kiliaen van Rensselaer, “Memorie,” 57.
10Ibid., 55.
11These are geographical miles of about 7.4 kilometers.
12Van Grol, Grondpolitiek, 11, 38. In her article “Kensselaerswyck 1629–1704” in: Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis, LX (1947): 4, L. van Nierop sees a clear difference with feudal law: “a medieval situation would almost be revived, if not the right of disposition by last will took away the most essential feature of a feudal relationship” (my translation). The historian who more than any one else was at home with the history of the founding of the patroonships and the correspondence of the first American Van Rensselaer’s, A.J.F. van Laer, has—as far as I know—never expressed himself clearly about the supposed feudal character of the patroonships. In a speech to the members of the New York State Historical Society on the occasion of the publication of the Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts, he called the patroonships “centers of local government, resembling the lordships of continental Europe,” (A.J.F. van Laer, “The patroon system and the colony of Rensselaerswyck” in: Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association, VIII (1909): 223.
14De Roever, “Kiliaen van Rensselaer en zijne kolonie Rensselaerswyck,” 40.
15Nissenson, Patroon’s Domain, 27.
University Press, 1968), 125.


18Condron, _New York Beginnings_, 125.


20The charters of Amsterdam and Zeeland have been compared by Van Grol, _Grondpolitiek_, i: 24–57.

21Theoretically, Van Rensselaer merely was the greatest participant in his patroonship. At his death, he possessed six-tenths of the shares. In reality, his fellow patroons only had a minimal influence.

22VRBM, 155–58.

23Jessurun, _Kiliaen van Rensselaer_, 25.


27Jessurun, _Kiliaen van Rensselaer_, appendix 10, xix.

28VRBM, 199, 200, 244.


30VRBM, 311.

31Ibid., 496, 499, 511, 559.

32Cf. the rent returns from 1642 through 1646, O’Callaghan, _History of New Netherland_, 1: 472.


38Slicher van Bath, _Agrarische Geschiedenis van West–Europa_, 309.

39Peter Kalm, _Reis door Noord–Amerika_ (Utrecht: J. van Schoonhoven en comp., 1772), ii: 48.

40W. Smith, _History of the late province of New York, from the first discovery to the year MDCCXXXII_ (Albany: Ryer Schermerhorn, 1814), 307.

41A. van der Donck, _Beschrijvinghe van Nieuw Nederland_ (Amsterdam: Evert Niewenhof, 1655), 27.


43Van der Donck, _Beschrijvinghe_, 25, 13.


45Lease contract of Evert Pels, May 1, 1653. See also VRBM, 761, 765, 768, 778.


47Fletcher, _Pennsylvania Agriculture_, 64; Bidwell, Falconer, _History of Agriculture in the Northern United States_, 8.


49Bidwell, Falconer, _History of Agriculture in the Northern United States_, 8.

50VRBM, 520.
Agricultural Productivity in Rensselaerswyck

51 O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I: 458.
52 Fletcher, Pennsylvania Agriculture, 64.
53 VRBM, 178. The first farm on Castle Island, Rensselaerswyck, was founded in 1631. VRBM, 308. The lease contract was drawn up in 1652.
54 O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I: 472.
55 Ibid., 477–78; See also the legal documents bearing on the case of Brant van Slichtenhorst vs. Johan van Rensselaer, among which are copies of several accounts of the patroonship between 1648 and 1652: State Archives in Gelderland at Arnhem, judicial archives (rechterlijke archieven) of the district of Veluwe, entry 438, no. 7. A price ratio of 3 to 1 can sometimes be found, for instance in Kingston in 1665. D. Versteeg, ed., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch. Kingston (Albany: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1976), II: 371.
56 VRBM, 207.
57 Correspondence of Jeremias van Rensselaer, 151.
58 VRBM, 233.
61 VRBM, 732–43.
64 O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I: 457.
65 Lemon, Best poor man’s country, 162.
66 VRBM, 732–43.
68 De Vries, Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 139–40.
70 De Vries, Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 183.
72 VRBM, 188, 502.
73 De Vries, Dutch rural economy in the Golden Age, 183.
75 Documents Van Slichtenhorst vs. Van Rensselaer (see note 55); RNA, I: 85; L. Noordegraaf, Daglonen in Alkmaar, 1500–1850 (n.p.: Historische Vereniging Holland, 1980), 49.
76 Documents Van Slichtenhorst vs. Van Rensselaer (see note 55).
78 VRBM, 732–43, 772–73.
80 VRBM, 193–95.
81 O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, I: 473–76.
83 Nissenson, Pataoon’s Domain, 43.
84 VRBM, 746–79.
85 Ibid., 732–43.
86 Kim, Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York, 189.
The interest in yield ratios often has been denounced as a typical European approach of agricultural productivity. Although this may be true for the later colonial years, in which the abundance of land and the shortage of labor made production per male worker the central issue, I assume that for tenant holdings that initially were not much enlarged by improvements yield ratios were a very important element in their profitability.

In calculating yield ratios, I have used the following method. The data on the tithe returns from 1642 through 1647 and scattered data in \textit{VRBM} and the documents bearing on the case of Van Slichtenhorst vs. Van Rensselaer served as a basis. For each year I have added the yields of those farms of which by approximation the size was known. In this way I could assess the yield per acre in these years. But although we know the acreage of a large number of farms, we do not have information on the part of these lands that lay fallow. Nevertheless, even if we take the position that as much as one third was not cultivated, the very low yields in the patroonship are affirmed. The average yield in all the years that we have data on (1642 through 1648 and 1651) was 6 bushels per acre if we do not account for any fallow, if we assume that one third lay fallow, the average yield was 9 bushels per acre.

In Notenhoek, just south of the patroonship, in 1671, 10 morgens of land had to be sown with 20 skipples of wheat, that is about 0.7 bushels per acre. Peter Kalm, a Swedish traveller who visited the region in the eighteenth century, states that around Albany a yield ratio of 1 to 12 was normal. According to the anonymous author of American Husbandry, (London: J. Bew, 1775) 1:10 to 1:15 was the average ratio in the northern Hudson Valley. It seems very probable that 2 skipples per morgen was a normal quantity of seed grain sown in seventeenth-century Rensselaerswyck. The good crops of 1638 and 1644 with about 11 bushels per acre would have given a yield ratio of 1:15. As stated above, the average yield we found was 9 bushels per acre (at a fallow of one third). If in Rensselaerswyck the tenants indeed sowed 0.7 bushels per acre (66 liter per hectare) this quantity gives a yield ratio of 1:12, the same Peter Kalm found in the eighteenth century! The rather speculative character of this calculation is self-evident.

For the model I have used to calculate the profitability of an average Rensselaerswyck farm, I am mainly indebted to Lemon's \textit{The best poor man's country}, 154–55, and to B.H. Slicher van Bath, “Agrarische produktiviteit in het pre-industriele Europa” in: \textit{Bijdragen tot de agrarische Geschiedenis} (Utrecht/Antwerpen: Spectrum, 1978), 165.

Many inhabitants of Rensselaerswyck were among the first settlers of Wiltwijck (Kingston), Beverwijck (Albany) and Schenectady.