

Adriaen van der Donck

A DIALOGUE
between
A PATRIOT
and a
NEW-NETHERLANDER
upon the Advantages which the
Country Presents to Settlers, &c.

in van der Donck,
Beschryvinge van Nieuw-Nederland
[Description of the New Netherlands]

1655 Excerpts



[Patriot (resident of Amsterdam)]: My worthy friend: I have heretofore embraced several opportunities and read with attention the particular description, of the natural formation of the New-Netherlands, and of the appearance and customs of the country, and have arrived at the conclusion that a burgher, farmer, or mechanic, and all other persons, can gain a comfortable subsistence in that country. I have, however, long desired to know your opinion in relation to other subjects connected with the settlement of that country, and therefore request your answers to the following propositions:

First. Whether it would be of any service to this city [Amsterdam], if the said country arrived at a flourishing condition, and wherein those advantages would consist and be continued.

Secondly. If there should be a great increase of population and riches in the country, whether the land presents situations for defense against an enemy, or robbers, by the construction of fortifications?

Thirdly. Whether the country presents proper situations for commerce and at what places, and in what articles we could trade to advantage; and, in short, please to state the subjects in connection and solve the same according to your own reflections?

New-Netherlander. Although I am not as well informed on the subjects of inquiry as I would wish to be, still I will endeavor to answer your propositions. And first: whether it would be of service to this city, if New-Netherlands were flourishing? I answer, yes — for the following reasons — or to come closer to your question, the advantages which this city may derive from that country are as follow:

First. If difficulties should arise with Spain, (which God forbid!) there then is no place in the world better situated, from which to strike at the heart and vitals of that nation, than from the New-Netherlands, where we have all things together, such as provisions, ship-timber, plank, knees, masts, &c,

* Excerpted, images added, and some spelling modernized by the National Humanities Center, 2006, www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/pds/pds.htm. From Adriaen van der Donck, *Beschryvinge van Nieuw-Nederland* [Description of the New Netherlands], 1656, translated from the original Dutch by Jeremiah Johnson, Collections of the New York Historical Society, 1841. Full text online as digital images (1) in Dutch at hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbkb.0004 and (2) in English hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/gcgb.005, from the Library of Congress and the National Library of the Netherlands, in the online collection The Atlantic Gateway: America and the New Netherlands / De Atlantische Wereld: Amerika en Nederland, and (3) in English at www.americanjourneys.org/aj-096/index.asp, from American Journeys: Eyewitness Accounts of Early American Exploration and Settlement (Wisconsin Historical Society).

that are necessary to equip our ships, in abundance. Whenever we desire to improve those advantages, we can do so without molestation.

Secondly. If it should happen that iron, timber, ashes, grain, and other articles which we now receive from the east, should fall short, the deficiencies can be supplied from the New-Netherlands in abundance, if we encourage and advance the settlement of the country, without which it is worth nothing.

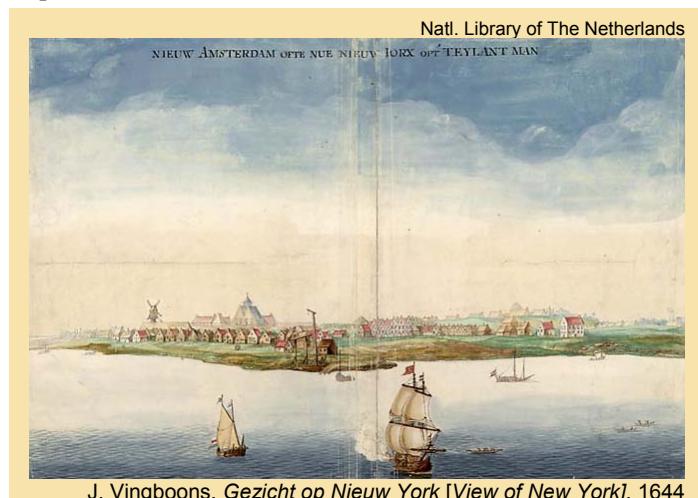
Thirdly. By so doing we shall always have a free and unobstructed commerce to and fro, and enjoy a free and profitable trade with the Lords' colony, from and to their own country, which in time will increase so much as now is deemed incredible. We see how much the trade has advanced in two or three years since we have encouraged the settlement of the country, and by going on from year to year, the gain will advance proportionally. But more of this upon the third question.

Fourthly. By pursuing this course and encouraging the population of the country, we could derive formidable assistance from the same in men and means in times of need, which causes all republics to be respected by those who envy their prosperity.

Fifthly. And as we well know that this country is visited by many people who seek employment, and who always found business; but since the peace,¹ there is not much employment, and there are many persons injuriously idle — hence it certainly appears, that it would be of service to the country to settle another Netherland with the excess of our population, which can be easily done, as a sheet-anchor and support to the state. By this I consider your first question answered. . . .

[Patriot] . . . When men of property and fashion go to that country, which is the case already, where, it is said, something may be gained, and where careful and industrious people flourish and prosper, for such become persons of importance, or at least their descendants do — what certainty can such persons have for themselves, and their property? . . .

. . . For I consider that to be a country which we have found, which is easy of access by sea and by land, open and unsupplied, or unfurnished with any considerable fortifications. The English and the Indians are strong and numerous around it. The Portuguese and other pirates can easily invade the place on the seaboard, in a short time; for it is easy of access, and near the ocean, and what is more, you well know that our nation is particularly attached to commerce. This I understand to be their principal object. They are industrious as merchants; but to the security of the country they pay but little attention; they trust to the militia, who are few in numbers. In fact I see great danger there, for if we took property to that country, or gained property therein, we are still insecure in our possessions.² . . .



J. Vingboons, *Gezicht op Nieuw York [View of New York]*, 1644

detail



¹ Peace – explain [NHC note]

² The invasion of Col. Nicholls, in 1664, proves the correctness of the Patriot's remarks. [translator's note, 1841 English ed., p. 231]

[New-Netherlander] . . . You say . . . that the country is unprovided with proper fortifications for its defense, and that its seaboard is unprotected, the land sides also. You advance too much. Observe, sir, that the South and the North rivers, are *lead-men's* waters,³ and for those who are unacquainted, the risk is great and the entries almost impossible. The bars and sand flats frequently shift their positions, and when an enemy has entered, his work is not done, he must come to places where he will find business, and pass forts of considerable strength on advantageous positions, equal to the forts of this country; and by the increase of men and means, as necessity requires, all is safe. . . .

. . . It is true you might with great hazard effect a landing, but your work would not be over, for the whole coast of the New-Netherlands presents double forelands, between which lay broad shallow waters, or there are islands two or three deep; and if you overlook and despise the inside waters, tell me where you will find boats to cross your men over the bays? This is work for madmen. It cannot be done; and if any person would attempt such work of folly, we would know it before a landing was effected from the Indians who watch the seashore, and are rewarded for giving intelligence whenever ships appear on the coast. . . .

Patriot. Very good. All this appears favourable against an outward invasion from the sea; but you have the Indians within, and the English are numerous on either side. You know very well how dangerous it is to have such powerful and ticklish neighbors. What do you say to this?

New-Netherlander. As for the native Indians they need not be feared. They may terrify a stranger or a newcomer. . . . The last war we had with them,⁴ when we were not half as strong as we now are, they remember so well that they will not readily begin again. When we speak of the beginning of the troubles with them, there was little fault on their side; still it is done and past. But respecting the English, that subject deserves deep reflection, and presents difficulties and dangers, and I assure you that we of the New-Netherlands are not so proud as to be easily enticed, nor do we desire to get into difficulties or war with those of Virginia or of New-England.

Patriot. Get into quarrels, man! we would anxiously desire to avoid the same. But you can no longer have rest or peace, unless your neighbors agree with you in the same opinion.

New-Netherlander. . . . The Virginians can do nothing unless they come by sea. Their account is answered already. A land march presents insurmountable difficulties. The people of New-England are much stronger than we are; but that it will suit them better than it will us to enter into unnecessary disputes, is a matter I do not profess to know, seeing they possess a country wherein commerce must prosper, which they cannot pursue to advantage southward of Cape Cod without passing our channel within Long Island. Again, they lie open along the coast above one hundred miles, without forts, soldiers, or armaments for their security. Their planters and inhabitants are trained for defense against the Indians, for which they are sufficient; and if we suffer any affront from them, they must know that we, with few men, and less than we can spare in New-Netherlands for the purpose, in small parties, can ransack their whole country, seeing they lie widely dispersed in small defenseless villages contiguous to the woods, which may be

³ That is, requiring the aid of a *loodsman*, or pilot. [editor's note, 1841 English edition, p. 232]

⁴ Explanation. [NHC note]



surprised and destroyed by night, and the parties again retire in safety through the woods; so that I do not fear them much. . . . Can you discern that it is not their interest to give offense, or to war against us? Not that I ascribe all this to their good will; but their interest and advantage bind them to peace. Danger and difficulties lie in a contrary course.

As for the Portuguese and pirates spoken of, there is little to be feared from them. The difficulties already stated are a protection against such invaders. But admit that a pirate entered with a sloop in disguise what would it amount to? The place would be his grave before he could do any injury. Without an army no danger need be apprehended. . . .

Patriot. Since now, though not willingly, I admit that the dangers are not so great as was supposed by me, we will therefore drop that subject, and speak of the commerce; and tell me, at once, how that is to be supported in time by the population? . . .

New-Netherlander. We must look to commerce, and there we can have it; and that which at present is carried on in the New-Netherlands, consists mostly in grain, as wheat, rye, peas, barley, &c, and in pork, beef, fish, beer and wine, and what is necessary for families, for the back and the belly. All other things are plenty, which, with the commerce of navigable streams, of which we will treat, quantities are sent to the islands in the West Indies, with which we have long since assisted the islands; and as the population increases, the productions will increase. The settlers who now come to the country raise their own provisions in the second year, and in the third year they have a surplus, which they exchange for wares and tobacco. They who can import articles, find many kinds of peltries, such as beaver skins, otters, bears, elk and deer skins, &c, as may be seen in the History of the country. The planting of vineyards is progressing, and in time will be of importance. So also are the outland fisheries. If a hundred ship loads are required, the fish are there during the whole winter. Train oil can be made at the South bays, where whales are plenty. . . .

. . . It is now about fifteen years since the New-Netherlands has in earnest begun to be settled by freemen. In that time we have endured a destructive war, otherwise it would have been double to what it now is. For that which before had been done by the company, except the fortifications and a few houses, of little importance, the residue was destroyed in the war. Until now few people of property have emigrated to the country. All who went over would gain much and bring nothing, except the merchants, who brought something, but carried much more away, which is common. Thus in new countries at the first, there are few churchmasters but persons who anoint their own breast, and are careless about the means and the latter end, and regardless of the common good, worthy citizens not included. Still there are without deception many good men, who love orderly behavior, and have erected good dwellings. . . .

. . . The country is well calculated and possesses the necessities for a profitable trade. First, it is a fine fruitful country. Secondly, it has fine navigable rivers extending far inland, by which the productions of the country can be brought to places of traffic. The Indians, without our labor or trouble, bring to us their fur trade, worth tons of gold, which may be



American bald eagle and beaver

illustrations in Jan Veltén, *Wonderen der Natuur* [Wonders of Nature], 1700



increased, and is like goods found. To which may be added the grain and provision trade, which we proudly enjoy. . . .

[**New-Netherlander**] . . . In conclusion, a country like the New-Netherlands, possessing such advantages for commerce, and that of and within itself, and abounding with articles for commerce beyond its own wants, which it can spare when attention is paid to the subject and the same be properly directed, will it not prosper? Judge for yourself.

Patriot. It does not appear strange to me, and we would not do wrong, in taking proper measures to advance the prosperity of that land, but more of this on another occasion. At present I deem my inquiries answered. In time I may think further upon the matter, and renew my inquiries.

New-Netherlander. That must then be done in the New Netherlands, for my departure is at hand, and I have now no leisure to enjoy your company.

Patriot. Return, then, to that country, with good will, and may you find the same as you expect.

New-Netherlander. With the help of God, my hope and design is such, and thus I take my leave and departure.

Patriot. Well, sir, I wish that the Lord our God may grant you a prosperous voyage, and bless you with his special favour, and those who dwell in the New Netherlands, in time and forever, to the furthering and magnifying of his Holy Name and Glory. Amen.



A. Montanus, *De Nieuwe en onbekende weereld* [The new and unknown world, or description of America and the South-land], Amsterdam, 1671, frontispiece illustrating "llamas from South America, beavers from North America, Native Americans, and a variety of Europeans gathering gems, coins, and tobacco from the rich land." [Library of Congress, The Atlantic Gateway: America and The Netherlands]