



Life in New Amsterdam Educator Resource Guide



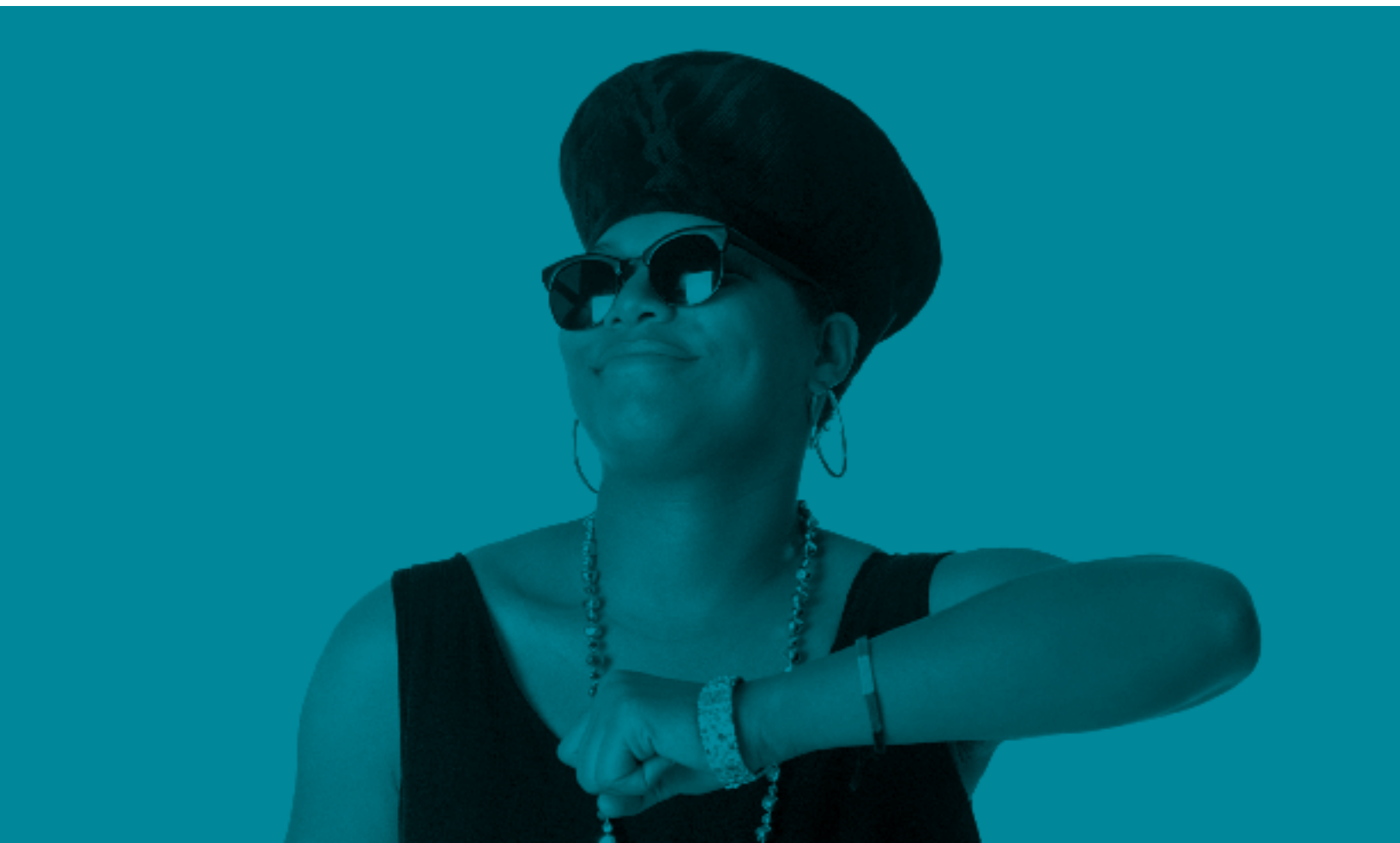
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Firth Haring Fabend **People of New Amsterdam**



People of New Amsterdam

If there is one idea to take away from a consideration of the people of New Amsterdam in the Dutch period (1624–1664/74), it is that they lived in an economic and social hierarchy not all that different from that of New York today. At the top of the social ladder were those few individuals who by their birth, ingenuity, hard work, or sheer luck were able to enjoy the best opportunities for social advancement, the best housing, the finest clothing, superior educational opportunities for their children, and freedom from want in all aspects of their lives [but they had been fearful of disease, war, etc.] — New Amsterdam's 1%.

At the other end of the social spectrum were enslaved Africans, torn from their various homelands and forced to labor in the land of their white masters, to live in shabby, leaky, dirt-floored hovels, and, worst, to know that their loved ones could be separated from them at any moment. For most enslaved people, even the bottom rung of the economic ladder was an impossible dream. A small fortunate number of enslaved Africans had been given their freedom in 1643, or at least “conditional freedom” and some land. These families were able to eke out their lives under their own roofs in the “Out Ward,” the territory north of modern Wall Street, where their farms stretched out from today's Lower East Side, northward up Manhattan to today's Harlem.

In between these extremes were the “middling” folk to whose lives the Castello Plan gives insight as to their land holdings and occupations. By comparing the information from the map with other records of New Amsterdam — taxes paid or assessed, court appearances, and evidence of their participation in the civil and religious life of the community — we learn that, as in New York today, there were many gradations of well being. Director-General Petrus Stuyvesant, high-up city officials, clergymen, merchants, and military officers lived cheek and jowl by jailer, tavern keepers, and tailors. Mansions and poor houses, government buildings and boarding houses, brew houses and warehouses sprouted willy-nilly on residential streets amid the houses of the great and not-so-great.

About 300 residences are noted on the Castello Plan. The key to the plan identifies many, but not all, of the house owners or renters by occupation, which range from accountants and attorneys to bakers, blacksmith, brewers, carpenters, chimney sweeps, drummer, ferry operator, glass maker, hat maker, inn keeper, limner (painter), merchants, midwife, poet, surveyor, traders, and a trumpeter — in other words, occupations to fill every need and desire of a busy community. Other records indicate that essential occupations not noted on the plan — for instance, boat builder and wheelwright — were also represented. A look at two of these residents illustrates how the typical New Amsterdammers used every tool at their disposal to clear their survival paths and to achieve their goals of economic betterment.

The house of boat building Lambert Huybertsen Mol is number 18 in Block Q of the plan. It is situated just to the south of the wall with plenty of space on both sides to allow room for drydocks to repair boats during the winter months since it was a significant source of income for Lambert. Lambert first appeared in New Amsterdam in 1626, but as a widower and father of two, he subsequently returned to his origins in Gelderland, a province of the Netherlands. There he was married a second time, to a widow, Trijn Pieters, and proceeded to have four more children. For Lambert, New Amsterdam, not Old Amsterdam, represented the main chance, and by 1641 he returned to purchase a sizable piece of land suited to boat building on Long Island that extended along the East River for 300 paces, about where the Long Island end of the Williamsburg Bridge appears today. By 1656 he had the financial means to buy his land on Manhattan just south of the wall, and 10 years later he owned land on Manhattan along the East River north of the wall.

Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten, wheelwright, also from Gelderland, first appears in New Amsterdam's records in 1637. The policy of the Dutch West India Company to provide

OPPOSITE PAGE (TOP):

M. J. Van Mierevelt (1567–1641).

Katrien Van Cortlandt. 1636. 73.230.2

OPPOSITE PAGE (BOTTOM):

Janette Beckman. Queen Latifah. 1990.

Courtesy and © Janette Beckman

ABOUT

Firth Haring Fabend

As a teenager, I learned from a teacher that my Dutch ancestors had settled the town where I was born, Tappan, NY, in the 1680s. This intrigued me, but it wasn't until I was in college that I learned there was much more to the story. In my sophomore year, Professor John A. Kouwenhoeven, the author of *The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York*, showed me in his wonderful book, a copy of the Manatus Map of 1639, pointing out to me the farm of his ancestor and the farm of one of mine. They had to have known each other, he said, for the community was very small. I was thunderstruck that such evidence existed from nearly 400 years in the past. But it wasn't until many years later, when I was trying to avoid deciding on a dissertation topic for my Ph.D, that it all came together. To procrastinate, I decided to write a little 10 page history of Tappan and my Dutch ancestors to celebrate Tappan's Tercentennial. In the New York Public Library, I stumbled on a typewritten genealogy of my father's family, and the hunt was on! That little essay became the core of my dissertation and my book *A Dutch Family in the Middle Colonies, 1660-1800*. It has been said that a teacher never knows where his or her influence ends. How true!

*Firth Haring Fabend is an independent historian specializing in the Dutch of New Netherland and Colonial and post-Colonial New York and New Jersey. She is the author, in addition to the prize-winning *A Dutch Family in the Middle Colonies, of Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals, and most recently New Netherland in a Nutshell: A Concise History of the Dutch Colony in North America, as well as many essays and chapters in books. She is a Charter Fellow of the New Netherland Institute, and a Fellow of the Holland Society of New York and the New York Academy of History.**

settlers with as much land as they could sow and mow in a year, free of charge for 10 years, enabled Cosyn to receive a patent for about 68 acres in the vicinity of today's New York University. Cosyn's house does not appear on the Castello Plan, because by 1660 he had sold it and another that he owned and moved to a property north of the wall. But land records make clear that he had bought, sold, and rented parts of his 68 acres over the years to enhance his fortunes, which as a wheelwright were bright. Then, as now, everyone needed wheels, whether for wagons, wheelbarrows, or dung carts, and these conveyances were in reliable need of repair on a regular basis.

New Amsterdammers like Lambert and Cosyn worked hard at their chosen occupations, and cannily used their real estate to feather their nests. They were situated firmly in what might be called today the middle to upper-middle class of New Amsterdam. But their fortunes and those of their families were fragile. All could be lost in a trice by an accident, illness, or premature death. Life insurance was unknown, and life itself was precarious, especially for a widow and even more so for a widow with children to support. The Reformed Dutch Church deacons disbursed alms as they could, and an Orphans Court administered justice as required, but a family needed its breadwinner, and if he disappeared for one reason or another, it was thrown on the mercy of its neighbors, literally. The court records of New Amsterdam are full of examples of frugal, if not impecunious, stuiver-pinching citizens suing each other over a purloined handkerchief, or a mismeasured plank, or an undervalued hog.

For the most part, New Amsterdammers were hard working, law-abiding people whose endeavors to survive, to earn their livings, and to rise in the world belie the sensationalist image of them often put forth as ne'er do wells. In addition to their labors, they served their community in roles mundane but essential: as dog catchers, fence-minders, firemen, and night watchmen, and in the most able among them as members of court and council, and as elders and deacons in the church. And while Lambert Huybertsen Mol and Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten might no longer live in lower Manhattan, it is thanks to existing maps like the Castello Plan that allows us to imagine the pattern of their daily lives.

LESSON 6

Introducing the Topic

The people of New Amsterdam came from many different places and celebrated many different cultures. Some were born into wealthy families. Others were not born with wealth, but earned it in other ways. Slaves were brought from Africa with few to no rights. Between these extremes were people who worked at many types of occupations to fill the needs of their busy community, and to support themselves and their families. Occupations included baker, blacksmith, brewer, carpenter, chimney sweep, drummer, ferry operator, glass maker, hat maker, inn keeper, limner or painter, merchant, midwife, poet, surveyor, trader, trumpeter, boat builder, wheelwright, dog-catcher, fence-minder, fireman, night watchman, council member, farmer, butcher, Director-General, and burgomaster. In many ways, the diversity New York City is known for today was reflected in the daily life of New Amsterdam.

Essential Questions

What was the social and economic structure of New Amsterdam? What opportunities were available to some of New Amsterdam's population to make a living and improve their lives? How is the entrepreneurial spirit of the people of New Amsterdam reflected in New York City today?

Vocabulary List

- Ancestor
- Burgomaster
- Descendent
- Diversity
- Entrepreneur
- Occupation
- Opportunity



Tile. Late 17th century. 63.95.8

Introducing the Sources

In this lesson, newly digitized artifacts from the Museum of the City of New York's collection will help students learn about the people of New Amsterdam and how they prospered there.

**M. J. Van Mierevelt (1567–1641).
Katrien Van Cortlandt. 1636.
73.230.2**

- This portrait was painted in the Netherlands by M. J. Van Mierevelt and brought to New Amsterdam by Katrien's son, Oloff Stevensen van Cortlandt, in 1638.
- Katrien is seated on a chair, looking straight out, with a slight smile on her face. She is wearing a black dress with white cuffs with lace. She is wearing a white cap on her head, a white ruff around her neck, and rings on her fingers.
- There is a book beside her on a table.
- All of these materials — black cloth, lace, jewelry, books, and portraits themselves — were expensive, so it is likely she was wealthy.
- Katrien van Cortlandt lived in the Netherlands, and she came from a wealthy family. Her son Oloff Stevensen van Cortlandt brought his mother's portrait with him when he came to New Amsterdam as an officer of the Dutch West India Company. He was also an entrepreneur, a brewer, and a merchant. His success led him to become one of the wealthiest men in New Netherland. Eventually he rose to become Burgomaster or Mayor of New Amsterdam, and stayed through the transition to English control in 1664. He was one of the wealthiest men in New York City, as well. His descendants, who are also Katrien's descendants, founded Van Cortlandt Manor and built the Van Cortlandt House in the Bronx, which you can still visit today, in Van Cortlandt Park.



OBJECT BASED QUESTIONS

- Notice details of the subject's pose, clothing, and other items you see. From these clues, what can you guess about this woman's social and economic status?

**White linen ruff. ca. 1640.
40.114**

- This accessory was worn around the neck by men and women. It was probably made around 1640, close to the time the portrait of Katrien van Cortlandt was painted.
- It is made of white linen, a cloth that is made from the flax plant. Flax was grown on farms in New Netherland.
- The wealthiest would buy and wear items like this but needed other people to produce them.



OBJECT BASED QUESTIONS

- What is this artifact? How does it connect to the portrait of Katrien Van Cortlandt?
- What material do you think it is made of?
- Who might have been involved in producing artifacts like this one? Draw connections between this artifact and other artifacts and people from other lessons.
 - Flax was grown on farms. These lessons include the deed that tells us about Petrus Stuyvesant's purchase of a farm, the Company's Bouwerie No. 1.
 - Enslaved people labored on farms owned by the Dutch West India Company.
 - Asser Levy traded in linens and clothing.
 - Women and girls in New Amsterdam sewed various items made of linen.
 - Ruffs like this were expensive because of all the labor it took to grow the flax, process it into linen cloth, and cut and sew the cloth to make the ruff. Then it took more work and more money to keep it clean and beautiful. In order to make a ruff stand up around the wearer's neck, it had to be stiffened with starch. This process also took a long time and a great deal of work.

Tile. Late 17th century. 63.95.3

- This tile shows a man using an axe to chop wood. Every household that wanted warmth in winter, or hot food at any time of year, needed wood to burn in a fireplace. Trees had to be cut down and then split into pieces small enough to fit in the fireplace to cook food and heat homes and other spaces.
- Tiles of this style were placed around fireplaces in New Amsterdam and imported from the city of Delft in the Netherlands. Such tiles typically featured a blue design on a white background and depicted a person engaged in a familiar activity.



OBJECT BASED QUESTIONS

- What is the man depicted in the object doing? Notice what he is holding.
- Why would a person in New Amsterdam need to chop wood?
- Many occupations in New Amsterdam involved working with wood. Have students recall the list of jobs necessary in New Amsterdam that they developed in the Introduction lesson, or brainstorm new ideas.

Further Reading: Lambert Huybertsen Mol and Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten

Have students read the paragraphs about Lambert Huybertsen Mol and Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten in Firth Haring Fabend's essay (or read out loud to younger students). How do their stories relate to the images and artifacts in this lesson? What clues do their stories give us about the people of New Amsterdam and how they helped the colony, themselves, and their families to prosper? What can we discover about the families of these individuals? (Optional: use the Castello Plan to find the locations described in the biographies.)

Lambert Huybertsen Mol was a boat builder. This occupation was vital to New Amsterdam because the town's prosperity relied on local and international trade, and because of New Amsterdam's location on an island. All international trade and travel had to go on the water, so it was essential to build boats and ships and keep them in good repair.

- 17th-century boats and ships were all made of wood. Lambert's business would have needed many trees to be cut down and shaped using tools such as the axe seen on the tile.
- Lambert was an early resident of New Amsterdam with his wife and two children, but when his wife died, he went back to the Netherlands. There, he married a woman named Trijn Pieters, and they had four children.
- New Amsterdam offered a better chance of prosperity for Lambert and his family, so he returned and bought a large piece of land on the East River which was an excellent location for his boat building business.
- Over the next decades, he made enough money to buy two more pieces of land, on both sides of the wall, located at today's Wall Street.

Cosyn Gerritsen van Putten was a wheelwright who made and repaired wheels. Wheels were essential for local travel and trade. However, there were no rubber tires in this time. Cosyn, too, would have used wood to construct transportation for the people of New Amsterdam.

Cosyn and Lambert both used their skills to make and repair things that the colony needed. The money they earned allowed them to expand their businesses and invest in land, which they could use to give themselves and their families better lives.



Tile. Late 17th century. 63.95.4

Activity

Have students brainstorm a list of occupations and community roles that people needed to fill in New Amsterdam. Begin with a review of the list they developed in the Introduction lesson, then build on that drawing from this and other lessons.

After students develop a list, have them brainstorm ideas about an activity each person in these roles would be required to do.



Then have each student select their favorite and use these ideas to create their own design for a tile depicting an activity of one of the many diverse people of New Amsterdam. Provide students with access to other images from these lessons for reference and inspiration, such as the portrait of Katrien van Cortlandt, the Pearl Street and Coenties Slip print, and the *Novi Belgii* map.

Contemporary Connections

How is the legacy of the Dutch entrepreneurial spirit reflected in New York City today?

- Today, as in the 17th century, people in this city work hard to create better lives for themselves and their families. Organizations in New York City, and the city government itself, run programs such as Women Entrepreneurs NYC and the NYC Entrepreneurial Fund to help New Yorkers begin and develop their own businesses. These businesses help the city to continue to grow, as well.
- The entrepreneurial spirit of members of the Van Cortlandt family led them to purchase estates and build houses in the Bronx and in other parts of New York State. New Yorkers can visit the Van Cortlandt House, located in Van Cortlandt Park.

Have students read Firth Fabend's account of how she became interested in studying New Amsterdam (or read out loud to younger students).

What inspired Firth Fabend to find out more about New Amsterdam?

Firth Fabend learned from one of her teachers that her Dutch ancestors had settled her hometown of Tappan, New York. Later, she was surprised and fascinated to discover a connection when her college professor used a map to point out that his ancestors and hers must have known each other in 1639, because they were neighbors in the same small New Netherland community.

Where are your ancestors from and what questions do you have about their place of origin?