



Crowned by Tobacco

In the 1660s, coveted Chesapeake tobacco from the English colonies found an insatiable market in the Netherlands. The result was a trading frenzy with New Amsterdam's merchants in the middle.

BY 1660, THE CITY OF NEW AMSTERDAM WAS BOOMING. DURING THE TRADING SEASON THAT YEAR, five ships arrived from the Netherlands loaded with goods and more than two hundred new immigrants. The city's population had jumped more than 50 percent in the past four years, reflecting a general rise in immigration taking place in all of New Netherland. Ever since the West India Company (WIC) abandoned its fur trading monopoly in 1639, private merchants aggressively pursued a variety of lucrative mercantile opportunities. By 1653, they had secured a city charter to provide order and stability for their commercial community. The Stadthuys, seat of New Amsterdam's municipal government, stood, appropriately, across from the city wharf. A burgher standing on the Stadthuys' new

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stoop could observe the trading activity that was the life-blood of New Amsterdam: large quantities of furs, hides, and foodstuffs from the Hudson Valley being loaded for shipment, new colonists disembarking after a long voyage, slaves waiting to be sold, and assorted goods arriving from Europe. Featured in this commercial bazaar were hogsheads of tobacco, large barrels filled with five hundred pounds of Chesapeake leaf being transferred from small coastal vessels to larger transoceanic ships headed for the tobacco-hungry Netherlands.

FACING PAGE: A 1636 painting by Flemish artist Adrian Brouwer depicts the artist and his friends smoking and drinking. The use of tobacco was so central to Dutch social life that a traveller observed that the "smell of the Dutch Republic was the smell of tobacco."

In the early 1660s, new opportunities for tobacco trading emerged at a time when high hopes for the future collided with geopolitical uncertainty. Local merchants and their regional partners enthusiastically embraced both new opportunity and risk, vigorously pursuing the tobacco trade in what can best be described as a frenzy. Some were rewarded for their aggressiveness, while others were ruined.

New Netherlanders had long been interested in tobacco. Efforts to grow the crop began in the early days of settlement, experiments in tobacco farming taking place in Manhattan, on Long Island, and in the Hudson Valley. In 1638, the WIC simultaneously encouraged local cultivation of tobacco while permitting imports from the Chesapeake. In advertisements designed to lure new settlers in the early 1660s, the company boasted that "heere groweth tobacco very good, it naturally abounds."

Interest in growing and trading in tobacco was spurred by Holland's insatiable craving for the smokable leaf. In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands led the world in the tobacco trade, and Dutch ports served as entrepôts for leaf destined for both the thriving domestic market and for re-exportation to Russia and the Baltic. Both domestic and international markets favored a blend of Chesapeake leaf (usually high quality and comparatively pricey) mixed with a coarser leaf grown near Amersfoort, Holland.

By the 1670s, almost six million pounds of this blend were re-exported annually from the Netherlands. This trade had a profound effect on Holland's domestic economy. Amsterdam became the headquarters of the tobacco processing industry, while in nearby Gouda, more than half of the labor force (approximately 16,000 people) was employed as pipe makers. Social use of tobacco had become so woven into everyday life that a traveler through the Low Countries observed that the "smell of the Dutch Republic was the smell of tobacco." Throughout much of the century, the Netherlands was said to be "a country where demon gold is rested on a throne of cheese, crowned by tobacco."

English tobacco growers in the Chesapeake region became increasingly interested in this attractive Dutch market. Colonists in Maryland and Virginia had long struggled to balance profitability and production, but throughout much of the seventeenth century, the English tobacco market was stagnant. Due to overproduction, prices generally fell between 1620 and 1680. Chesapeake tobacco growers faced an especially bleak future in the 1640s. Revolutionary upheavals of that decade did not bode well for tobacco's future; Puritans in England were not as ambivalent as Dutch Calvinists about the moral dangers of tobacco. Faced with this new challenge, yet aware that tobacco was vital to their economic well being, many Virginia growers looked to the lucrative Dutch market and to Manhattan merchants who could provide them access to it.

As this economy became increasingly dependent on Dutch carriers, Virginians challenged the English govern-

Two sides of Augustine Heermans's token: The obverse (top) has six arms, representing the six provinces of the Netherlands. These support a column that is surmounted by the hat of Liberty which rests upon the Bible. On the reverse (below), six arrows are clasped by two hands. Around the perimeter is the inscription, "CALC SENAT PROVINC VNIT BELGII," which means "struck in 1590 by the Senate of the United Provinces of Northern Gaul", Belgii being the Latin name for the northern division of Gaul.



The initial on this fragment of a seventeenth-century Dutch pipe stands for Edward Bird or his son Evert. The Birds' pipes were the most popular in New Amsterdam.



Artifacts of the Tobacco Trade

THE ORNATE, LATE-SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY PIPE FROM GOUDA (BELOW RIGHT) IS ONE OF THE FEW DUTCH PIPES FOUND in Dr. Lukas van Tienhoven's privy. Although evidence suggests that New Amsterdammers preferred Dutch pipes, even after the English takeover in 1664, archaeologists noticed greater numbers of English pipes as the century progressed. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Dutch pipes were a rarity. The most popular Dutch pipes in New Amsterdam were made in Amsterdam by Edward Bird or his son Evert. The Birds marked their products with the trademark initials "EB" (bottom left). Even after his death in 1664, Bird's widow maintained her association with merchants central to the shipping of Bird products to New Amsterdam. The token or privately issued coin (left) was found wedged between the cobbles of the warehouse belonging to Augustine Heermans, New Amsterdam's leading tobacco merchant. Struck in 1590 and the oldest dated European artifact found in New York City, this copper alloy coin was privately issued by Prince Maurice of Nassau (1567-1625) to commemorate his election as Stadtholder of Utrecht.



Both sides of the bowl of a tobacco pipe from Gouda, the Netherlands, are shown. On the left side as the bowl faces the smoker (above), an African or Native American woman looks up at the sky. She is bare-breasted and carries a long-stemmed smoking pipe in her left hand and a roll of tobacco in her right as she strides purposefully across the grass. The obverse (right) depicts a Turk or idealized version of a Native American wearing a long cape, ankle-length skirt, and a blouse with seven buttons. He stands elegantly on the grass in soft boots, with elbow akimbo. He might represent a prototype of a "cigar-store Indian."

A



ment, which was considering restrictions on the tobacco trade. A disaffection with London's proposals in 1647 pushed Virginians into the arms of the Dutch colony to the north. Soon, commercial relationships between the two colonies improved to such an extent that the first formal commercial treaty between the two was signed in 1653.

Several years later, the provincial governments in New Netherland and the Chesapeake colonies gave another substantial boost to the regional tobacco trade. The first significant development came as a result of a diplomatic mission initiated by Director-General Peter Stuyvesant. Facing a potential boundary dispute with Lord Baltimore over company claims to the Delaware River (then called the South River), Stuyvesant dispatched Augustine Heermans to see the Governor of Maryland. Heermans, an established Manhattan merchant who claimed to be the "first beginner of the tobacco trade," traveled with Manhattan burgher Resolved Waldron. In negotiations with Philip Calvert, the colony's secretary, they reached an amicable settlement on the boundary questions.

After these discussions, Heermans had private conversations with Calvert concerning mutual trade and commerce between Maryland and New Netherland, which "could be easily carried on." Calvert seemed to know about the commercial potential to which Heermans was referring, talking "about New Netherland and Virginia and the conveniences of both being considered, he wished Maryland may be so fortunate as to have cities and villages like Manhattan." Heermans must have agreed with Calvert's assessment, and even suggested that trade between Manhattan and Maryland could be beneficial to the governor himself. As if to either encourage or reward such commercial prospects, the governor soon granted a patent for 30,000 acres of Maryland land to Heermans, which became the Manor of New Bohemia.

Formal relationships between the governments of New Netherland and Virginia, which had steadily improved in the 1650s, resulted in a new commercial

treaty in 1660. In February of that year, Peter Stuyvesant sent his brother-in-law, Nicholas Varlet, and Brian Newton, his English adjutant, to negotiations at Jamestown. The agreement reached with Virginia's governor, Sir William Berkeley, concluded that free trade between the two colonies was essential, and promised to facilitate commerce by guaranteeing all traders prompt and equal justice in the courts and offering a way to deal with absconding debtors.

Encouraged by these new agreements, English regional factors stepped up to meet the demands of Manhattan's merchants. Samuel Smith became one of those Englishmen who regularly supplied Chesapeake tobacco to New Amsterdam merchants. In September of 1660, he signed two contracts exchanging tobacco for merchandise imported from Holland. Manhattan's Frerick Gysbertsen agreed to supply him with cloth: 135 ells of linen in exchange for 1,350 pounds of tobacco, and six pieces of silk damask for 1,129 pounds of tobacco. In the same month, Smith made a deal with Jan Gillesen de Jonge to exchange 1,838 pounds of tobacco for 1,148 pounds of nails and 69 Swedish axes.

Englishmen in Virginia and Maryland were elated to have access to the Amsterdam market via Manhattan, but new circumstances threatened to dampen their enthusiasm. By late 1660, they received shocking news from the Restoration government in England: the newly passed Navigation Act made tobacco an enumerated commodity and prohibited direct trade with Dutch ports in Europe or America. Given the threat to their trade, English growers and their middlemen resolved to avoid the new restrictions. In Manhattan, local merchants were aware that the new Navigation Act could ultimately lead to war.

Nevertheless, the combination of lower prices, strong supply, continued high demand in Amsterdam, and a potential threat to the free flow of tobacco made merchants and transporters more eager than ever to find ways to collect and trade

tobacco. The obvious necessity for more ways to carry tobacco to Manhattan was apparent to Ritzert Airy who hired Edward Leake's ship *Providence* for a voyage from Virginia to Manhattan. Samuel Etsall, a New Amsterdam hatter, followed a similar strategy when he made arrangements with Englishman Eduard Prescott to ship tobacco to New Amsterdam. Prescott was only too willing to comply and was able to avoid English customs regulations by collecting tobacco at several stops along the way. With his partner, Allard Anthony, Etsall agreed to deliver 3,270 pounds of tobacco to Cornelis Steenwyck, one of New Amsterdam's most prominent merchants.

Unfortunately the risks taken by men like Airy and Etsall did not satisfy some Manhattan merchants who were unhappy with the amount of tobacco they had received. In the spring of 1661, some merchants relentlessly sought out tobacco wherever they could find it. Cornelis Steenwijck, for example, was surprised to learn that someone else claimed tobacco he had received from Samuel Smith. When Paulus Blyenberg sued Samuel Smith for a previous debt, Steenwijck was forced to give up the tobacco he had received from Smith.

In an effort to regain the lost tobacco, Steenwijck sued Blyenberg, claiming an unpaid debt for an anchor. Many other local merchants used the municipal court to help secure extra supplies of tobacco. Plaintiffs increasingly insisted on payment in tobacco where they had previously accepted alternative forms of repayment.

Grabbing all possible supplies of tobacco might have been a successful strategy if the merchants could guarantee its shipment overseas. Unfortunately, as the new trading season opened in the spring of 1662, a new concern emerged: would enough ships from the Netherlands arrive to transport the tobacco to the European market? To ensure that they would have the bottoms necessary to carry their wares, Manhattan-based merchants employed a variety of tactics, from bartering for ships to outright seizure of ships, disguised as legal transactions.

The actions of a Manhattan-based trading partnership, organized by Cornelis

er with some ox hides. However, instead of unloading all of the tobacco in Manhattan, Boot decided to venture fourteen hogsheads on a quick voyage to New England, hoping for a more certain sale and a better price. His gamble was unsuccessful in two ways: not only was Boot unable to make his quick profit, but also on his return voyage, the *Providence* struck a rock in the East River's treacherous Hellgate. The "hold became full of water on the flood, and all the rest of the tobacco was ruined, except of a few tubs which were saved."

The end of the 1662 trading season in the fall offered temporary relief from the frenzied trading activity of the previous months. The degree to which the tobacco enthusiasm would continue in 1663 depended on the number of ships that arrived from Holland. When six transatlantic vessels arrived in 1663, then again in 1664, merchants continued their commerce in a less frenetic but still enthusiastic pace. Manhattan merchants and their suppliers were certainly pleased that the Navigation Act of 1660 had little impact on the flow of Chesapeake tobacco entering Manhattan. But English officials in London were sorely disappointed by the act's failure and sought to remedy the situation by taking control of New Amsterdam.

The English force that entered the waters of Manhattan in August 1664 did not surprise local merchants; they had anticipated the arrival for months. The merchants also knew that in spite of the jurisdictional changes that would ensue, the English provincial governors would depend heavily on them and their overseas partners to keep the colony's economy afloat.

The Articles of Capitulation of 1664 offered extremely favorable commercial terms. The most significant was the clause that made New Amsterdam burghers "denizens" of the English empire, entitling them to trade privileges equal to those of natural-born English citizens. Thus, the English intrusion actually resolved some of the conditions that contributed to the trading frenzy. Shipments of tobacco from the Chesapeake to New York City to Holland continued to produce great profits, especially for a new generation of tobacco merchants.

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This Dutch tobacco box (ca.1750-1820) is engraved with a mariner's log timer on one side (facing page) and a perpetual calendar on the other (below). The brass box is attributed to Pieter Holm of Amsterdam.

