

Dutch Trade with New England

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In the first half of the seventeenth century New England was an amorphous collection of settlements with widely varying ideologies and goals. Almost the only attributes all of these had in common were their virtually undiluted English blood and at certain periods their economic vulnerability.

Generations of Americans grew up in an English-oriented educational atmosphere where one of the historical superstitions drilled into our grade-school heads was the sacred nature and unchallenged supremacy of British maritime trade laws in the colonial period. Within recent years research historians and archaeologists, working in a variety of interlocking disciplines, have revealed the cracks in this structure. In the early seventeenth century, several nations traded here, often in violation of British statutes, and none with such insouciance as the Dutch, who were traders by tradition and masters of the art.

Throughout the seventeenth century the exigencies of European politics had their echo in the American colonies, and Britain's attitudes toward the Dutch trade here varied with the changes in its diplomatic relationships with the Netherlands. Thus, the Treaty of Southampton (September 7, 1625) between the British and the Dutch marked a relaxation of barriers in providing that "the ports shall be open and free for the subjects of both parties as well as merchants," and that "[Dutch] merchant ships can take shelter in English ports without unloading cargoes or paying duties."¹ Yet such trading amnesties could be quickly superseded by the passage of the strictest of navigation laws, or nullified by actual war between England and Holland.

In 1651, after the blood bath of the Civil War, the Commonwealth government, free at last to get on with the country's business, passed the first Navigation Act, which sharply curbed the trade of the English colonies with foreign powers. A minute of the English Privy Council of 1662, concerning the "secret trade with the Dutch," charges that the plantations were "delivering tobacco at sea . . . carrying the same to New England. . .

and thence shipping it in Dutch bottoms,"² and were committing other illegal practices contrary to the Navigation Acts. And in June, 1663, the British government dispatched to the governors of New England an official paper, complaining of their complaisance in allowing Dutch, Spanish and Venetian ships to trade in their ports.³ Similar protests and orders flowed intermittently from the British governmental offices throughout the seventeenth century, only to be craftily circumvented by the Dutch and the English colonials, working together.

Justin Winsor claimed that the Dutch had been trading on the New England coast since 1598,⁴ which supports the earlier claim of Isaack de Rasiere, West India Company agent at New Amsterdam, who in 1627 wrote William Bradford that the Dutch had been trading there for twenty-six years.⁵ This trade of course was primarily with the indigenous people, or with the French settlements in Maine and Canada.

James Bradley, of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, remarks that "The initial pattern of Dutch trade was random cruising along the mid-Atlantic and north Atlantic coasts, the ships of several small rival companies competing with one another." Bradley further points out that Dutch traders "continued to work the southern coast of New England well into the seventeenth century," that is, for many years after the Dutch had bowed out as a political power in North America.⁶ Many source documents support these statements.

What are believed to be Dutch-supplied artifacts have been found on the site of Pentagoët and at other settlements in Maine.⁷ Apparently some of the early Maine sites there were excavated some years ago by non-professionals, whose records were not complete. The Plymouth people had a trading post and settlement there in 1625, however, and they almost certainly traded with the Dutch at that time. Pentagoët was later a French settlement, and still later an English one. And the Dutch took it from the English in 1674 in the course of one of the Anglo-Dutch wars.

As the number of English settlements grew in New England, it became evident to all of these that they could not count on the mother country for the economic support they needed. This was in part because some of the settlements were founded as private fur trading enterprises supported by entrepreneurs whose operating capital often proved unequal to the demand; but in large part the problems of the New England settlers came about because, to put it crudely, the British government and the British commercial world had not yet got their colonial act together.

The period of the 1640s was a particularly critical one for the New England colonists. There developed a drastic shortage of credit, which in turn affected the fur trade by limiting the supply of trade goods they could import. In addition, English merchants of that period knew little about the taste of the Indians in goods, and there is documentary evidence that both the French in Canada and the English in New England recognized the superior appeal to the native Americans of Dutch trade goods, and were eager to obtain these. Ready money was so drastically short in New England at this time that it was necessary for the Massachusetts legislature to pass acts encouraging the use of barter in trade.⁸ The Dutch had long been comfortable with barter as a means of exchange; and it was the Dutch, too, who introduced the New England traders to the use of wampum and who first supplied them with it.

Once the supply of beaver was exhausted in the New England area, their fur trade was on the way out. Unlike the French and the Dutch, they could not expand westward or northward because those two nations blocked them in these directions. The New Englanders had to turn to other industries to survive; and one of these they began seriously to consider was shipping, by which they would eventually achieve a lucrative foreign trade. The New Englanders needed ships immediately, however, and turned to the Dutch to supply these until they could build their own.

Among the various documentary sources that testify to this commerce in maritime craft are the Boston Aspinwall Papers,⁹ and the *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*. The latter are indispensable to anyone doing research in New York's early history. The Dutch were usually the vendors in these sales, though occasionally the role was reversed. Typical is a court record of a transaction at Fort Amsterdam in New Netherland whereby on 26 January 1645, Jan Evertsen Bout and Jan

Jansz Damen gave Isaac Allerton power of attorney to sell the ship *St. Pieter* in New England.¹⁰ Allerton was originally a Plymouth settler who had lived in Holland, and more than any other New Englander, except perhaps Thomas Willett, identified himself with the Dutch and was deeply involved with them in trade.

Undoubtedly, the final circumstance that drove the New Englanders into the arms of the Dutch, commercially speaking, was the troubles in England leading to the Civil War, which so preoccupied the governing authorities there that they seriously neglected the colonies. The outbreak of the war itself, in 1642, intensified the isolation of the New England settlers. As Bailyn says in his book on New England merchants in the seventeenth century, the war "snapped the organizing cords of public life" in England.¹¹ Left to fend for themselves, the New England people had no recourse other than to trade with the Dutch.

As one studies the numerous documents that testify to the activity and continuity of the trade between New Englanders and the Dutch, there appears to have existed between the two a kind of love-hate relationship. Both acknowledged this, yet neither allowed it to destroy a mutually beneficial commerce, though this was occasionally interrupted by bickering. However, both sides were singularly indifferent to the attitudes of their respective governments toward their trade.

Plymouth

E. B. O'Callaghan, a basic New York historian of the Dutch period, states that the Dutch and the Plymouth settlers had not met until 1627,¹² which is difficult to understand, considering the Pilgrim's residence in Holland prior to their coming to New England and the early Dutch presence up and down the New England coast. At any rate, in 1627 Isaack de Rasiere, agent of the West India Company who was then in New Amsterdam, wrote a letter to Governor Bradford in Plymouth, suggesting that ". . . If it so fall out that any goods that comes to our hands from our native countrie, may be serviceable unto you, we shall take our selves bound to help and accomodate therwith; either for beaver or any other wares or marchandise that you should be pleased to deale for."¹³ Governor Bradford immediately replied, saying, "Your freindly offer to accomodate us with any commodities . . . is to us very acceptable." Yet he added a paragraph asking that the people of New Netherland "would forebear to trade with the natives in this bay, and

river of Narragansett . . . which is as it were at our doors."¹⁴ Later, writing about these exchanges in his *History of Plymouth Plantation*, Bradford stated that it was the Dutch who at this time introduced the people of Plymouth to the use of wampum in the Indian trade, and adds, "After this ther was many passages betweene them both and they had . . . profitable commerce together for diverce years . . ." ¹⁵ Weeden quotes Bradford as saying that in this trade the Dutch received tobacco from Plymouth in exchange for Dutch consumer goods.¹⁶

One of those serio-comic embroilments in which the colonial Americans sometimes found themselves involved occurred in connection with the Dutch-Plymouth trade when in the year 1634, a certain Captain Stone from the Island of St. Christopher, while on a visit to New Amsterdam, persuaded Van Twiller, the Dutch governor, to let him seize a trading bark from Plymouth moored there. Stone and followers went aboard the bark when its master and mate were ashore and ordered the crew to set sail. Then as William Bradford tells it in his history of Plymouth, "They all sailed away toward Virginia."¹⁷ However, some Dutch seamen at the harbor, resenting the treatment given their friends from Plymouth, gave chase and recaptured the bark.

One would expect this to be the end of Captain Stone, but Bradford recounts that he "came afterwards to Plymouth and had friendly and civill entertainente," after which he unsuccessfully tried to stab Governor Bradford, and was expelled from the colony. Later, returning to New England again, he incurred the displeasure of the Western Niantic Indians who, in Bradford's words, "knockt him in the head as he lay in his cabine."¹⁸ Given the character of Captain Stone, one cannot judge the Indians too harshly. Later this became one of the alleged causes of a bitter war between the Niantics and the settlers.¹⁹

Plymouth became a backwater town when it no longer had access to peltry, but until then its trade with the Dutch was considerable.

Massachusetts Bay

Although the Massachusetts Bay Colony made a tardy entry on the colonial scene, within a few years Boston was the only town in North America that could rival New Amsterdam in its commerce. It was heavily populated with people closely related to influential London merchants of the time, and, as Bailyn wrote, "Blood relation-

ships between English suppliers and New England merchants were an exceptionally useful bond."²⁰ This is something that impresses one in going through the Aspinwall Papers, which are the records of a Boston notary from 1644—1651. Yet even this consanguinity between the merchants of the town of Boston and the City of London was not enough to freeze out the Dutch trade, though it may have modified the type of goods exchanged.

John Winthrop's *Journal* records that a Dutch pink arrived in Boston in May 1633,²¹ and in October of the same year a bark from Massachusetts Bay visited New Amsterdam, where they were kindly entertained, and traded for beaver.²² He further notes, "Our neighbors of Plymouth and we oft trade with the Dutch at Hudson's river,"²³ and he lists among the commodities received from the Dutch there, sheep and beaver, brass cannon, sugar, wine, linen and other commodities. We find an echo of this in a New Netherland document for 1650 showing that at that time New Netherland officials complained that Stuyvesant "hath sold the Company's guns and cannon, with all sorts of munitions of war, to the English at Boston."²⁴

The early Boston records, as well as those of New Netherland, all testify to this constant contact in trade between Massachusetts Bay and the Dutch. Weeden, the New England historian, says, "The Boston trade with the Dutch had assumed such proportions by 1643 that a special act was passed there to regulate the Dutch coin."²⁵ This need to use Dutch currency also indicates that the Massachusetts people lacked English money.

Much of the Boston trade cleared through New Amsterdam, but free trading ships from Holland also appear in these records, though in violation of West India Company regulations. Long after the original navigation act of 1651, the British Lords of trade were so exercised over Boston's evasion of their trade laws that they sent Edward Randolph over to look into this. He reported, "All nations have free liberty to vend their commodities there."²⁶ Certainly, no one who understands thoroughly Dutch trading proclivities could doubt that the Dutch were among those who took full advantage of this, even if documentary sources were not there to show it.

The Aspinwall Papers have Dutch names, anglicized to such a degree that one only knows they are Dutch because of the familiar Dutch name combinations, and the accompanying names of their ships. One Dutchman

appears as Christopher Johnson—in reality Christoffel Jansen, master of the *Oranjeboom*, out of Amsterdam.

In studying the ceramic artifacts found on early seventeenth century Boston archaeological sites, one finds Dutch types, yet the number of these is fewer than those found on Virginia and Maryland sites. At the Virginia plantation sites and at Jamestown, one is amazed at the sheer quantity of these. It is true, however, that Boston and the two southern colonies occupied different societal frames, the one represented by small town sites of Puritan homes that had a contained economy; the other by the plantation households of a free-spending, tobacco-rich people. Inevitably their material cultures diverged.

Whatever the reason for this difference in the artifacts, it does not nullify the documentary evidence that the Dutch commodity trade with Boston was a flourishing one.

Connecticut

In consequence of clashes of interest between the Dutch and the Connecticut settlers on the north shore of Long Island, on the South River (Delaware), and on the Connecticut River, where the Dutch had in 1633 established Fort *Goed Hoop*, Dutch relationships with Connecticut were stormier than with the other New England colonies. So inflamed was the situation by 3 April 1642 that on that date the Council for New Netherland forbade its citizens to trade with Connecticut because of the English takeover there of Dutch-claimed territory.²⁷ This was a most significant action when it is considered that the Dutch rarely let hostilities interfere with their trade. In the end, however, the mutual cupidity of the Dutch and the Connecticut settlers proved stronger than the wrangling of their officials, and trade between the two continued throughout the century, though perhaps never in such volume or in such friendliness as with the other New England colonies.

As in the case of Massachusetts, contracts involving the exchange of ships between New Netherland and Connecticut appear often enough in the court records to indicate a brisk trade in that area. In a bill of sale of September, 1647, Petrus Stuyvesant conveyed to Stephen Goodyear, deputy governor of New Haven, the former West India Company ship, *Swol*.²⁸ This had a rather interesting sequel. As has been noted earlier, a certain amount of the Dutch trade with New England was carried on *sub rosa* by Dutch free traders operating out of Holland. In 1647 shortly after the sale of the *Swol*, but

before she had been delivered to the purchaser, Cornelis Claesen Snoy, master of the ship *St. Beninjo*, a Dutch free trading vessel then lying at New Haven, asked permission of the New Netherland authorities to proceed to New Amsterdam to trade. Although this would be in violation of Dutch West India Company regulations, Stuyvesant granted the request on the grounds that he had no means of forcibly seizing the *St. Beninjo*, and thought the local merchants might as well profit from the trade.²⁹ A short time later the master and one of the owners of the *St. Beninjo* arrived in Manhattan on Govert Aertsen's sloop, having left their ship in New Haven. The New Netherland authorities had by this time established that the ship's cargo included contraband in the form of guns and powder, and they decided on a plan to seize her. Since the *Swol* was scheduled to be delivered to her new owner in New Haven, they determined to equip that craft with a fighting crew and ammunition sufficient to take the *St. Beninjo* by force and bring her to Manhattan, which was subsequently accomplished.³⁰

New Netherland records and the records of the Colony of Connecticut both contain references to trading contracts between private individuals from the two areas. For the most part these are insignificant in the number of persons and goods involved, yet they may be considered as a kind of tip of the iceberg of a wider trade. There is no time here to consider the sheer bulk of charges, counter charges, and conflicting land claims that frequently interrupted the trade between the Dutch and Connecticut. Yet the trade persisted—without doubt because it was to the interest of both sides.

Rhode Island

Strong documentary evidence supports the Dutch claim voiced by Petrus Stuyvesant on several occasions that it was the Dutch who originally named Rhode Island—by them spelled *Roode Eylant*—meaning “Red Island.”³¹ Rhode Island histories usually attribute the derivation of the name to the Island of Rhodes. Whether or not Fort Ninigret at Charlestown, Rhode Island, was a Dutch fort or an Indian one, as has been disputed, there is documentary and archaeological evidence that the Dutch were trading there in the 1620s.³² Paul Huey has established that a heavily ornamented brass circlet found archaeologically at Fort Ninigret is identical to the one recovered from the wreck of the Dutch ship *Batavia* which sank off Western Australia in 1629.³³ Other artifacts believed to be Dutch have been found at Ninigret.³⁴

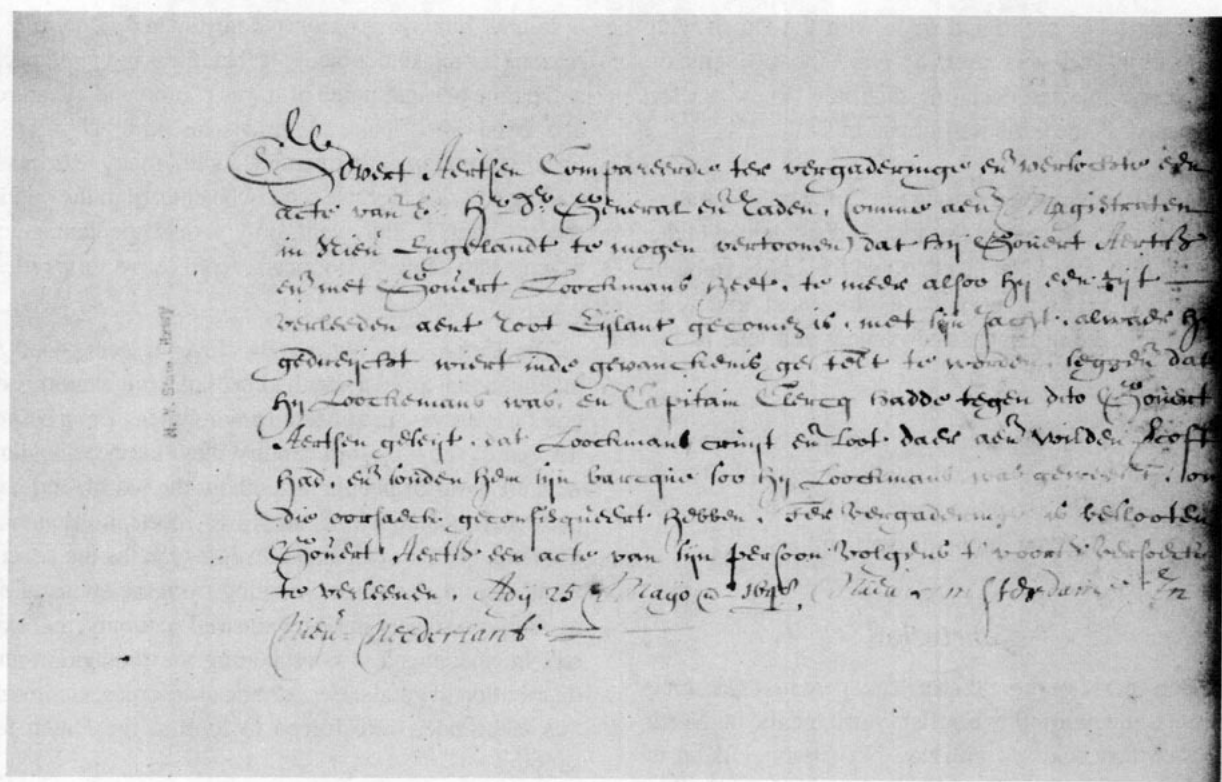


Fig. 43. Resolution to furnish Govert Aertsen with a certificate, to be shown to the magistrates of New England, that he is not Govert Loockermans. NYCM, IV/385. Courtesy of the New York State Library, Albany.

In certain respects the Dutch and the liberal Rhode Islanders had more in common than either had with the authoritarian government of Massachusetts Bay. After its founding, Rhode Island was for a time dependent on the Indian trade, yet like other English colonies, found it difficult to maintain credit for trade goods in England, or even to obtain from there trade goods pleasing to the Indian. It was natural, then, that they should turn to the Dutch at nearby Manhattan to supply them.

With the events leading to the Civil War in England, the problem of trade goods became acute. On 19 September 1642, the general court of Newport ordered the governor to "treat with the Dutch to supply us with necessaries, and to take of our commodities at such rate as may be suitable."³⁵ Bridenbaugh, another authoritative New England historian, comments that "Throughout the forties [1640s], most of the growing carrying trade between New Netherland and Rhode Island went on in Dutch bottoms."³⁶ Several prominent Rhode Island merchants and Dutch skippers are named by Bridenbaugh as being engaged in mutual trading, while there were two others, Jeremy Clarke and Richard Smith, who maintained houses at Manhattan, and are mentioned repeatedly in the Dutch court and notarial records there,

though as Jeremias Clercq and Ryckart Smit—a reversal of the New England habit of anglicizing the Dutch names.

The coming of members of the Society of Friends to Rhode Island, in 1657, was another factor that encouraged the Dutch trade there, since the Quakers perhaps had even more reason than the earlier settlers to dislike and distrust the men of Massachusetts Bay. In May, 1658, the Rhode Island general assembly forbade the seizure of Dutch ships in Narragansett Bay, unless by special order from England or by an order of the Rhode Island general assembly itself.³⁷ This was probably in answer to the privateering against Dutch ships that had come about in Rhode Island with the commencement of the first Anglo-Dutch war in 1652, and which appears to have been distasteful to many Rhode Islanders since it caused an interruption in their trade with the Dutch.

Unquestionably, the three Anglo-Dutch wars in the second half of the seventeenth century made it difficult for the Dutch to continue trade with the English colonies, yet it is probable that the trade with Rhode Island was the least affected, since relationships between the two had always been especially cordial. When in 1653 the Rhode

Island assembly prohibited trade with the Dutch with whom England was then at war, the citizens of Providence objected declaring that they "knew not for what reasons" the trade was stopped.³⁸

Smuggling was usual among the Dutch trading fraternity, and a typical case of this kind is documented in the Council Minutes of New Netherland for 2 May 1648, in which Govert Loockermans, a prominent trader, is accused of selling contraband powder and lead to the Rhode Island Indians.³⁹

Existing seventeenth century documents convey an impression that Dutch trade relationships with Rhode Island were closer and more genuinely friendly than with any other of the New England communities.

Conclusion

In the course of more than a year spent in researching Dutch trade with the English settlements in North America that coexisted with New Netherland, I found an unsuspected wealth of documentary evidence, as well as abundant archaeological testimony, that this trade was of

a volume hitherto grossly underestimated. One of the reasons for this undoubtedly is that it was not publicized at the time because much of it was contraband in nature, and, even when legal, the trade was never popular in English governmental quarters. Again, many legitimate trading activities had no need to be entered in the public records, and, in any event, only a small percentage of seventeenth century American records have survived.

The Dutch were not merely clever traders, good at making a fast guilder, but had behind them centuries of trading to survive in a difficult environment. Long before the end of the sixteenth century they had been trading with all kinds of people throughout the world, and had perfected techniques of supply to meet any demand. England, on the other hand, even as late as the seventeenth century was just emerging from the status of an agricultural society into an industrial economy, and was still inexperienced at coordinating the production and distribution of goods. Her American colonies, victims of this ineptitude, were forced to look to the Dutch for supplies.

Notes

- ¹Edmund B. O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 14 vols. (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Co., 1853–58), III: 2, 16, 23.
- ²*Ibid.*, III: 44.
- ³*Ibid.*, III: 45.
- ⁴Justin Winsor, *Narrative and Critical History of America*, 8 vols., (New York: AMS Press, 1967), III: 193.
- ⁵William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation 1606–1646*. William T. Davis, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 224–25.
- ⁶James W. Bradley, "Blue Crystals and Other Trinkets: Glass Beads from 16th and Early 17th Century New England," *Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Bead Conference*, Records No. 16, (Rochester, N.Y.: Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1983), 35.
- ⁷Symposium on Acadian Settlements in the 17th Century, Annual meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Boston, January 9–13, 1985; also, conversations with Paul R. Huey, who directed excavation of Ft. Orange (Albany, N.Y.) in 1970–71.
- ⁸Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 48.
- ⁹*A Volume Relating to the Early History of Boston, Containing the Aspinwall Notarial Records from 1644–1651*, volume 32 of *Records Relating to the Early History of Boston, 1877–1909*, (Boston: Municipal Printing Office, 1903).
- ¹⁰Arnold J.F. van Laer, et al., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch* 4 vols. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), II: 289.
- ¹¹Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants*, 45.
- ¹²Edmund B. O'Callaghan, *History of New Netherland*, 2 vols. (New York: Appleton-Century, 1848), I: 105.
- ¹³William T. Davis, ed., *Bradford's History of Plymouth Plantation 1606–1646* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 224–25.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*, 226–27.
- ¹⁶William Weeden, *Economic and Social History of New England 1620–1789* 2 vols. (New York: Hilary House Publishers, Ltd., 1963) I: 124.
- ¹⁷William T. Davis, ed. *Bradford's History*, 310–11.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁹Bruce G. Trigger, vol. ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), XV: 89.
- ²⁰Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants*, 35.
- ²¹James Kendall Hosmer, ed., *John Winthrop Journal 1630–1649*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), I: 102.
- ²²*Ibid.*, I: 109.
- ²³*Ibid.*, I: 130.
- ²⁴Edmund B. O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, I: 442.
- ²⁵William Weeden, *Economic and Social History*, I: 143; see also, Justin Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston*, 4 vols. (Boston: James Osgood & Co., 1880), I: 279–80, which gives this date as 1642.
- ²⁶Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants*, 157.
- ²⁷Arnold J.F. van Laer, et al., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*, IV: 140.
- ²⁸*Ibid.*, II: 489.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, IV: 435, 453.
- ³⁰*Ibid.*, IV: 453–60.
- ³¹Edmund B. O'Callaghan, *Documents Relative*, I: 285.
- ³²William B. Goodwin, "Notes Regarding the Origin of Fort Ninigret in the Narragansett Country at Charlestown," *Rhode Island Historical Society Collections*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January 1932), 1–2; Robert Grieve, "The Sea Trade and Its Development in Rhode Island and Providence Plantations," published in Edward Field's *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations at the End of the Century: A History*, 2 vols. (Boston: The Mason Publishing Co., 1902), II: 390.
- ³³Myra Stanbury, comp., *Batavia Catalog*, (Perth: Department of Marine Archaeology, Western Australian Museum, [1974] BAT 3132.
- ³⁴William B. Goodwin, "Notes Regarding the Origin of Fort Ninigret," v: 11.
- ³⁵*Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation in New England 1636–1663* (Providence: A. Crawford Greene and Brother, 1856), I: 126.
- ³⁶Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1974), 23.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, 61.
- ³⁸*Records of the Colony of Rhode Island*, I: 261.
- ³⁹Arnold J.F. van Laer, et al., *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*, IV: 519.

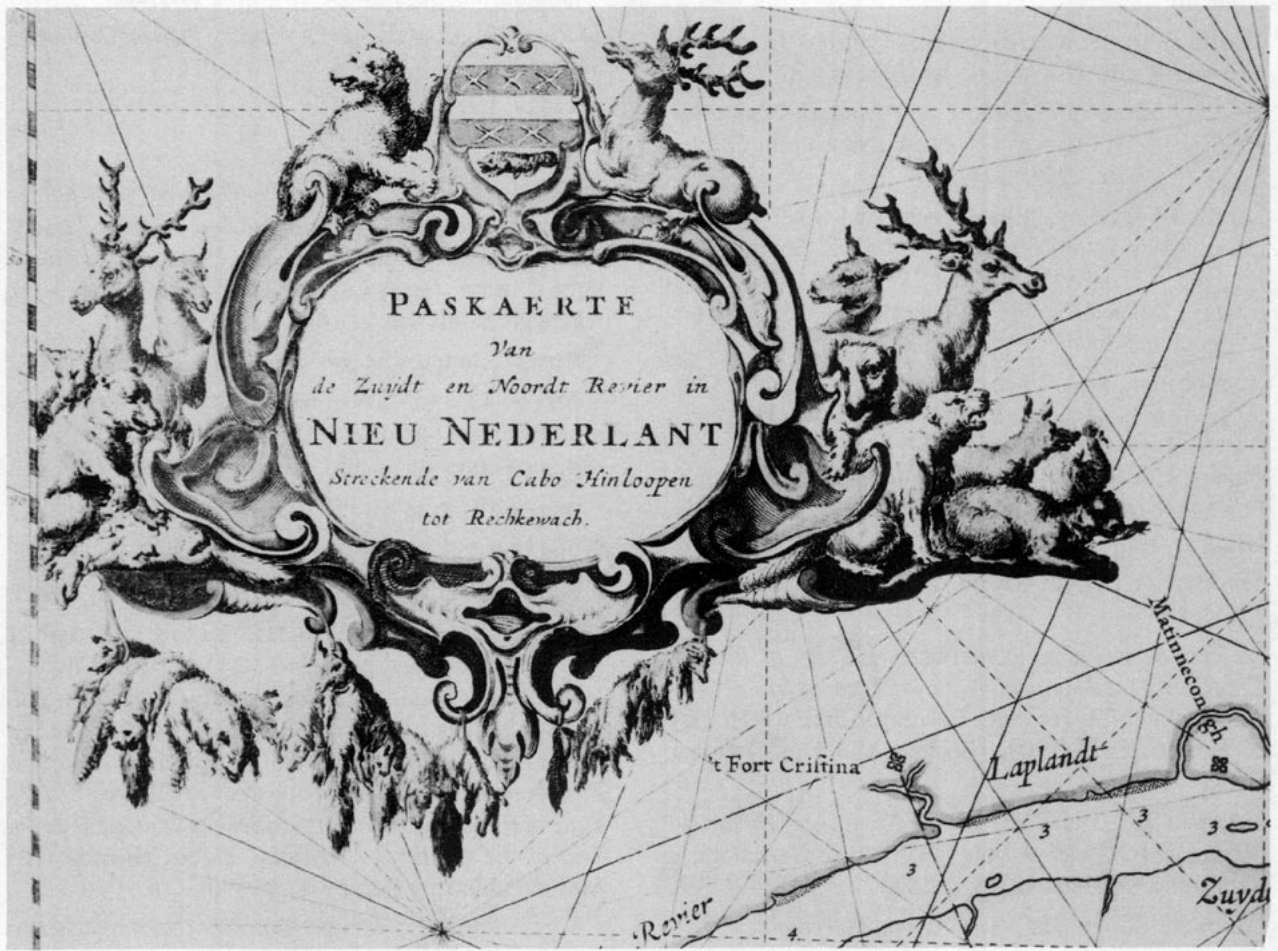


Fig. 44. Cartouche from Pieter Goos, *L'Atlas de la Mer*
Courtesy of Manuscripts & Special Collections, New York State Library, Albany.
This 1667 map shows furs prized in the Indian trade.