

## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR ANCESTORS ...

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW NETHERLAND: I — NEW AMSTERDAM (NEW YORK CITY)

**Guillaume Vigne  
(c. 1586 – 1621) &  
Adrienne Cuvelier  
(1590 – 1655) /  
Abraham Ver  
Planck (c. 1606 –  
c. 1691) & Maria  
Vigne (c. 1619 – c.  
1671) / Jan Jansen  
Van Breestede  
(c. 1596 – 1641) &  
Engeltje Jans (c.  
1600 – aft. 1673) /**

**— Bradley Rymph**

#### VISITS TO NEW YORK, NEW YORK:

**Multiple, including Dutch Heritage Trip,  
February 18–21, 2012 (with José  
Baquiran)**

In 1609, when Henry Hudson first sailed into the river waters that would eventually bear his name, the island that became Manhattan was a land of lush forests and over 500 hills. The original, native settlers of the island, the Lenni-Lenape, called it Mannahatta (island of hills).

Hudson had set sail in *De Halve Maen* (the *Half Moon*) to the Americas in quest of a passage way westward to the East Indies islands, off of Asia. As Hudson set his ship northward into the waters west of Manhattan island, he was convinced he had found his passage. Then, as the waters narrowed as he approached what is now the city of Albany, New York, Hudson realized that the waterway was only a river. He turned around, disappointed, and sailed back to the Netherlands.

Once back in Amsterdam, Hudson “told of the fur-bearing animals, and of what a vast fortune could be made if their skins could only be got to Holland, where furs were needed. He told of the Indians; and the river which flowed past the island he spoke of as ‘The River of the Mountains’” (history of holland.com). The Dutch merchants who had funded Hudson’s voyage were initially not impressed, focusing on the fact that he had failed to discover the westward package that, after all, had been the reason for his voyage. At the

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*Plaque in lower Manhattan on the north side of Pearl Street, near Broad Street, marking the site of the first church built on Manhattan Island, in 1633.*



time, however, animal furs for military usage as well as fashion were in such high demand that European beavers and other fur-bearing animals were on the verge of extinction. The Dutch realized that the wildlife seen by Hudson on his voyage could be a new route to wealth for them. Holland returned to America, and quickly began developing the areas up the Hudson River, as well as much of modern-day New Jersey, declaring it their territory of New Netherland.

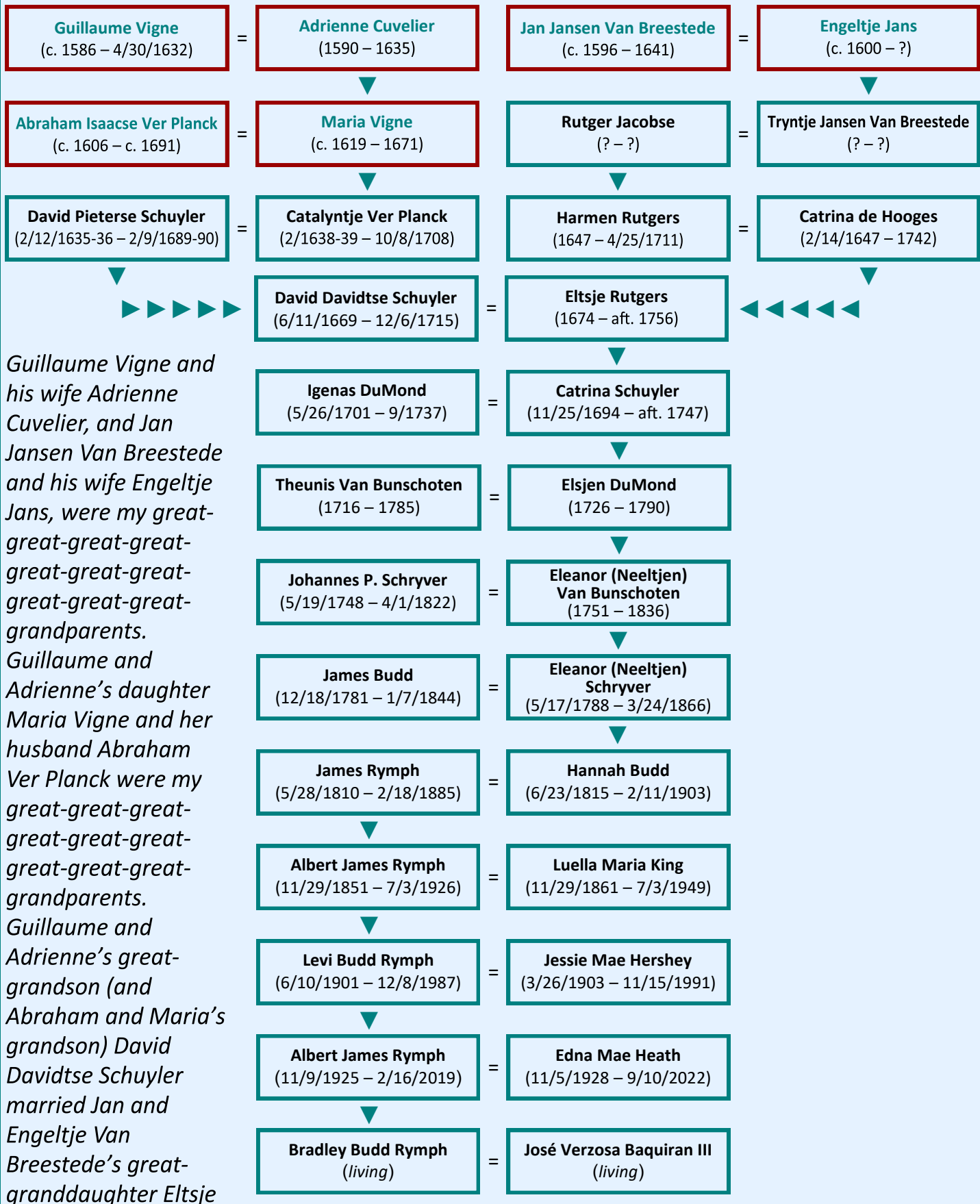
The merchants established the “West Indische Compagnie” (Dutch West India Company). Peter Minuit was hired to be the first governor of the New Netherland colony.

Once in America, “One of the first acts of Governor Minuit was to buy the Island of Manhattan from the Indians, giving them in exchange some beads, some brass ornaments, some bits of glass and some strips of colored cloth; all of which seemed a rich treasure to



*“View of New Amsterdam,”  
painted in 1665 by the  
Dutch painter Johannes Vingboons*

# HOW WE'RE RELATED





## CASTELLO PLAN (NEW AMSTERDAM IN 1660)

The Castello Plan is an illustrative map of New Amsterdam as it appeared in 1660. It was drawn by Jacque Cortelyou, who was surveyor of New Amsterdam at that time. Around 1667, a cartographer named Joan Blauwe bound together an atlas containing Cartelyou's map, as well as other early depictions of the settlement. At some point in the following 200+ years, the map made its way to Italy. It was discovered there in 1900 near the city of Florence in the Villa di Castello, from which the map received its contemporary name.



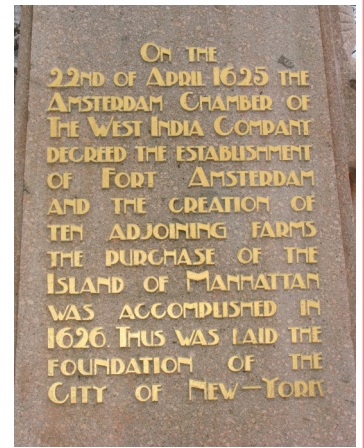
Redraft of the Castello Plan of New Amsterdam in 1660, drawn in 1916. Ancestral lands and structures included:

- = farm lands of Guillaume and Adrienne (Cuvelier) Vigne, approximately lower third of area; and of Jan Jansen Damen (2nd husband of Adrienne Cuvelier Vigne), approximately upper two-thirds of area
- ⋯ = farm home of Jan Vigne, son of Guillaume and Adrienne Vigne, after the death of his parents and stepfather
- = properties owned by Abraham Ver Planck
- = property owned by Jan Jansen Van Breestede, son of the ancestral immigrant Jan Jansen Van Breestede
- = properties owned or co-owned by the ancestral immigrant Rutger Jacobse
- = property owned by the ancestral immigrant Nicasius DeSille
- = property owned by Philip Pieterse Schuyler, brother of the ancestral immigrant David Pieterse Schuyler





*Netherlands Monument in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan Island. Monument, with Dutch flag flying, commemorates the purchase of Manhattan Island from the native peoples and the establishment of New Amsterdam.*



the Indians, but were in reality worth just 24 dollars” (historyofholland.com).

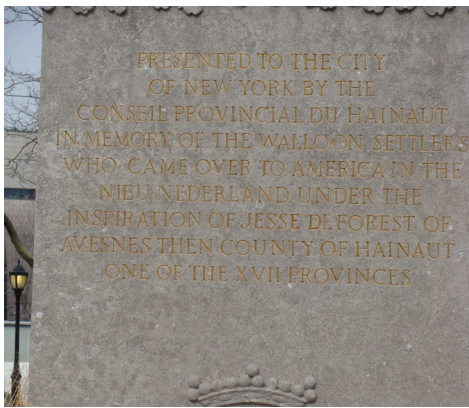
## GUILLAUME VIGNE / ADRIENNE CUVELIER

As they established New Netherland in the early 1620s, the Dutch needed people to settle their new domain. At the time, “Walloons,” French-speaking Calvinist Protestants from what is now Belgium and northern France, were being severely persecuted by the Roman Catholic monarchy of France.

These Protestants who refused to convert were routinely killed or driven out of the region.

Many Walloons, who had become refugees in Holland, petitioned the Dutch for selection to sail to America to serve the Dutch (who were also Calvinist Protestants) in the settlement of New Netherland. Thirty families were selected by the Dutch West India Company. Among these families were **Guillaume and Adrienne (Cuvelier) Vigne** and their daughters of





*Monument to the initial Walloon settlers aboard the Nieuw Nederland; placed in Manhattan's Battery Park on May 20, 1924. Monument was fashioned from the granite of Hainault, the province of modern-day Belgium from which most of the original Walloon settlers originated.*



Valenciennes, France.

The Vignes are believed to have been among the initial Walloons who sailed with Dutch fur traders and settlers from Amsterdam in April 1624 on the *Nieuw Nederlandt* (New Netherlands). They

may instead of been aboard the *Eendracht* (Unity), which also sailed from Holland to America in early 1624.

Upon their arrival in New Amsterdam in late spring 1624, the Walloons aboard the *Nieuw Nederlandt* were dispersed



*New York branch of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian, on the site where Fort Amsterdam stood in New Amsterdam.*





across New Netherland — south to Delaware Bay to set up a garrison, northeast to the Connecticut River to set up a trading post, some to what is now known as Governor's Island across from Manhattan, and some up the Hudson River to a site near present-day Albany. It is not known to which site the Vignes were sent.

In 1624 or 1625, shortly after the Vigne's arrival, their son Jan was born — the first European male born in New Netherland. (The first European female born in New Netherland, Sara Rapaelje, was born in June 1625.)

In any case, the Vignes (like most of the Walloons) soon returned to Manhattan Island. Fears of the native peoples in the area caused the Dutch to evacuate their settlers, including the Walloons, from their posts on the Connecticut and Delaware Rivers.

Upon their return to Manhattan Island, the Vignes established a family farm north of Wall street, becoming major landowners on the island (*see box, pp. 8–13*).

Guillaume Vigne died on April 30, 1632. By the time of his death, daughters Christina and Maria had married. Daughter Rachel and son Jan were minors.

## ABRAHAM VER PLANCK / MARIA VIGNE

Sometime around 1631, **Maria Vigne** married a man named Jan Roos. He died about one year into the marriage, leaving Maria with one son, Gerrit Jansen Roos. Maria remarried in 1634, to **Abraham Ver Planck**, who likely had arrived in New Amsterdam from the Netherlands just a year earlier. After their marriage, Maria and Abraham lived initially with Maria's recently widowed mother, until Maria's new stepfather filed suit in 1638 to have the couple and their young children evicted from his house shortly after his marriage to Adrienne (*see box, pp. 8–13*).

After being evicted from the home of Maria's mother and stepfather, the young couple moved across the Hudson River to the settlement of Paulus Hook (now part of Jersey City, New Jersey). They are believed to have had a farm there with two cows and to have leased four acres to two tobacco planters.

With the 1643 Indian wars, the Ver Plancks were forced to return to Manhattan Island. They continued to own their land at Paulus Hook but never returned there to live. Instead, they ceased farming, leased their land holdings, and turned to fur trading. In this new livelihood, Abraham frequently

## THE VIGNE FAMILY: Famous Colonists for All the Wrong Reasons

When Guillaume Vigne died on April 30, 1632, his widow Adrienne became the owner of his large farmlands north of New Amsterdam's Wall and along Manhattan Island's East River eastern coast. Within a few years (if not immediately thereafter), the dominant owner of the island's lands immediately west of Vigne's — a Dutch settler named **Jan Jansen Damen** — was in the process of negotiating a prenuptial agreement with Adrienne. As stated in that agreement, the two oldest Vigne daughters (Christina and Maria, both adult and married) were each granted 200 guilders as their share of their fathers estate. The two younger, minor children (Rachel and Jan), were each granted 300 guilders. In addition, in the agreement, Adrienne and Damen pledged together "to bring up the two above-named children until

they reach their majority, and be bound to clothe and rear the aforesaid children, to keep them in school and to give them a good trade, as parents ought to do." The agreement was dated "the last of April 1632" (i.e., the date of Guillaume's death), but was not recorded until May 7, 1638. The editor of the *New York Historical Manuscripts*, in which the agreement has been published, believes that 1632 was a mistake and should have said 1635 or later. The witness on the document did not himself arrive in New Amsterdam until 1634.)

Adrienne Vigne and Jan Jansen Damen were married on May 7, 1638. At that time, both Christina (with her husband and children) and Maria (with her second husband, **Abraham Ver Planck**, and their children) were living with Adrienne, Rachel, and Jan Vigne. On June 21, 1638, Damen went to court and sued to have Christina, Maria, and their families "quit his house and leave him the master thereof."

When Damen married Adrienne, their two estates were merged, so that Damen owned all the land on Manhattan Island from east (i.e., the East River) to west (i.e., the Hudson River), northward from Pine Street (just above the Wall) to Maiden Lane. In the coming years, Damen would continue to



*Guillaume and Adrienne's house sat on a lane on the northern edge of their farmland. This roadway, which remains in modern-day Manhattan, was named in Maiden Lane in honor of their three maiden (i.e., unmarried, at the time) daughters.*



increase his landholdings on Manhattan Island.

At some point, Damen apparently reconciled with Abraham Ver Planck. Together, the two of them, with Rachel Vigne's husband **Cornelis Van Tienhoven**, became responsible for one of the most notorious Indian massacres in U.S. colonial history. Van Tienhoven personally lead the attacks.\*

### **JAN DAMEN: "Blood on His Hands"**

On June 27, 2004, a feature story in the *New York Times* told the story of Damen's ownership of one particularly famous plot of land on the island, as well as his family's role in planning the Indian massacre:

#### **GROUND ZERO: BEFORE THE FALL**

On a hilly spot, near the edge of the Hudson River shoreline, Jan Jansen Damen used a horse-drawn plow to turn up the sandy soil in the late 1630's as he carefully laid out a farm on the small chunk of the New World that he had been allotted by the Dutch West India Company.

Next Sunday, on that same patch of Lower Manhattan land, Gov. George E. Pataki and other dignitaries will gather for

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\* Some historical sources report that Ver Planck subsequently claimed that he had been unaware of the incident and his brother-in-law's role.

another groundbreaking: the start of the construction of the Freedom Tower, the centerpiece of the new World Trade Center.

The extraordinary calamity that unfolded on the site on Sept. 11, 2001, dominates the nearly four centuries of history separating these two groundbreakings....

From early on, this land has been associated with bloodshed: Damen, for example, its first European owner, played a critical role in a decision by the early Dutch colonists to massacre Indians living at two nearby settlements, igniting two years of warfare....

Perhaps most important, it is on the same 16 acres where two towering temples to capitalism would one day be built that New York made its sometimes painful transition from a tiny colonial trading post



*Ground Zero site under re-construction,  
February 21, 2011*

to the most important metropolis in the world. By the 1850's, the once-rural spot had become an emporium of commerce, manufacturing and global transportation — in other words, a true world trade center....

### 1643: Pioneers and Bloodshed

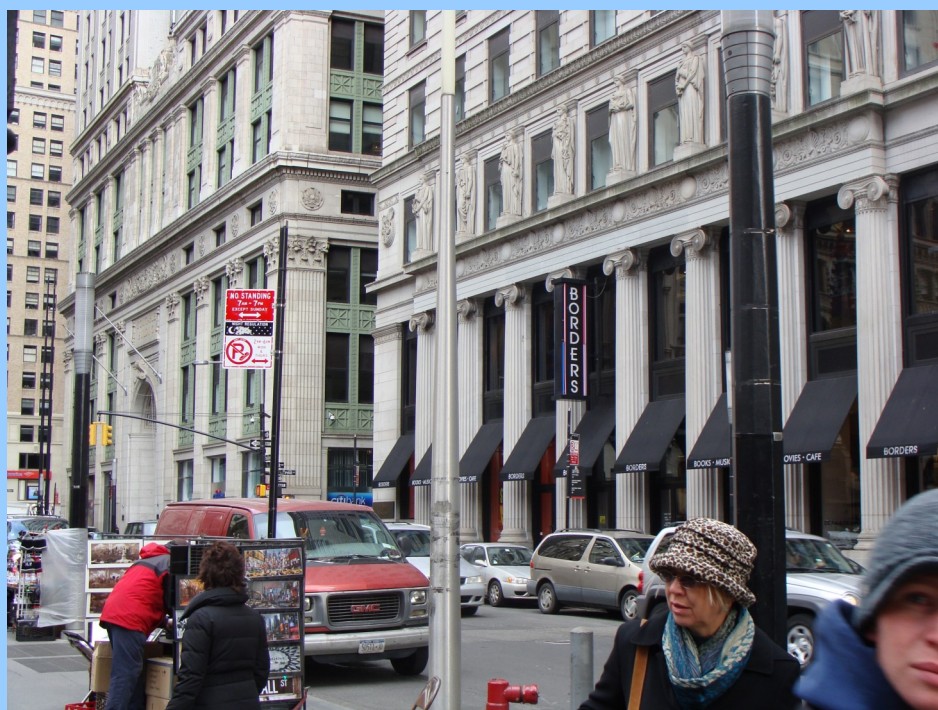
Jan Jansen Damen, who came from Holland around 1630 to help set up the new colony, was more than just a simple farmer. The first European owner of what would later become part of the World Trade Center site had much greater ambitions.

Like an early Donald Trump, Damen had a thirst for land and wealth. He pushed aggressively to secure commitments from the Dutch West India Company for grants or leases of property located just north of the barricade that was Wall Street. Below this barrier was all of settled New York, the land where the pioneers had built their crude, wooden-roofed homes.

When trouble came in the form of Indian attacks on settlers, the Dutch governor turned to Damen for advice, naming him in 1641 to New York's first local governing board, known as the Twelve Men.

The board's chairman, David Pietersen De Vries, urged Gov. Willem Kieft to be patient, as the tiny colony, with little in the form of arms or soldiers, was vulnerable and “the Indians, though cunning enough, would do no harm unless harm were done to them.”

Damen did not agree. His land, at the edge of the settled area, was particularly vulnerable. In February 1643, accounts written at the time say, Damen and two other members of the Twelve Men entertained the governor with conversation and wine and reminded him that the Indians had not complied with his demands to make reparations for recent attacks. “God having now delivered the enemy evidently into our hands, we beseech you to permit us to attack them,”



*In February 1643, Jan Jansen Damen, with his stepsons-in-law Abraham Ver Planck and Cornelis Van Tienhoven, hosted a dinner at his home on Broadway just north of Wall Street for colonial governor Willem Kieft and their fellow members of New Amsterdam's Council of 12. The alcohol flowed freely, and Damen, Ver Planck, and Van Tienhoven successfully persuaded other Council members to sign their petition urging Kieft to attack a neighboring Indian tribe. The attack that followed was the bloodiest Indian massacre in New Netherland colonial history. As of February 2011, a building housing a Borders bookstore stood on the approximate site of Damen's home.*



they wrote in Dutch, in a document that survives today.

DeVries tried to calm Governor Kieft: "You go to break the Indians' heads; it is our nation you are about to destroy." But the governor disagreed. It was time, he resolved, "to make the savages wipe their chops."

The assault, which took place about midnight on Feb. 25, 1643, in Jersey City, then called Pavonia, and at Corlears Hook, now part of the Lower East Side, was an extraordinarily gruesome affair. "Infants were torn from their mothers' breasts and hacked to pieces," DeVries relates in his journal. Others "came running to us from the country, having their hands cut off; some lost both arms and legs; some were supporting their entrails with their hands, while others were mangled in other horrid ways too horrid to be conceived." In all, more than 100 were killed.

The region's Indian tribes united against Governor Kieft and the colonists. Damen was nicknamed "the church warden with blood on his hands," and expelled from the local governing board. The governor was ultimately recalled by the Dutch. The colony, over two years of retaliatory attacks, sank to a desperate state.

"Almost every place is abandoned," a group of colonists wrote to authorities in Holland in late 1643. "We, wretched people, must skulk, with wives and children that still survive, in poverty together, in and around the fort at the Manahatas, where we are not safe even for an hour whilst the Indians daily threaten to overwhelm us."

Damen died about 1650. His heirs sold his property to two men: Oloff Stevensen Van Cortlandt, a brewer and one-time soldier in the Dutch West India militia, and Dirck Dey, a farmer and cattle brander. Their names were ultimately assigned to the streets at the trade center site. Damen's was lost to history....

### **ADRIENNE DAMEN: "Amused Herself in Kicking"**

The men of the Vigne/Damen family were not the only individuals in the clan to develop reputations of infamy as a result of the 1643 massacres. Legend has it that Adrienne herself behaved in a less-than-admirable manner. One historian wrote:

... it has been said of Adrienne Cuvellier that when one of her sons-in-law returned from the massacre of the Pavonia Indians in February 1643, with thirty prisoners and also heads of several of the defunct enemy, she "forgetful of those finer feelings that do honor to her sex, amused herself in kicking about the heads of the dead men which had been brought in as bloody trophies of the midnight slaughter."

### **CORNELIS VAN TIENHOVEN: "Loathed by Nearly Everyone"**

If it is possible, Van Tienhoven may have had an even less pleasant and more scandalous character than his wife's mother and stepfather had. The novelist Tobias Seamon published a biographical profile of Van Tienhoven in 2006. A few excerpts follow:

Cornelis Van Tienhoven first came to the New Amsterdam settlement at lower Manhattan in 1633. [When Willem Kieft became director of New Netherland in 1638, he] named Van Tienhoven *schout-fiscaal*, which meant he would be both sheriff and in essence the ranking official behind the director.... Described by contemporaries as grossly overweight with a “red and bloated visage,” ... it was also widely suspected that he was cooking the books, and, excepting the two directors he served under (the corrupt and autocratic Kieft, then the honest and autocratic Pieter Stuyvesant), Van Tienhoven was loathed by nearly everyone else in the New World....

Most of the Dutch [in New Amsterdam] considered Van Tienhoven an odious troublemaker whose machinations led to little except strife and ruination. By 1653, the good burghers of Manhattan ... begged the West India Company to remove Van Tienhoven despite Stuyvesant’s protestations. Van Tienhoven was ordered back to the Netherlands to account for the clamor.

Undeterred by being called to the carpet, Van Tienhoven took the opportunity abroad to seduce a young girl named Liesbeth Croon.... [T]he affair came known and grew into a full-fledged sex scandal, though apparently Miss Croon continued to remain in the dark about Van Tienhoven’s colonial family.... Van Tienhoven smuggled the unsuspecting Liesbeth on board a ship... and returned to New Amsterdam. [Once Croon arrived in the colony and discovered that Van Tienhoven already had a wife and three

children, she] filed a charge against Van Tienhoven for debauching her but the charge was ignored....

While the West India Company berated Van Tienhoven’s “impure private life and his questionable public conduct,” he remained, with Stuyvesant’s backing, an authority in the colony. Van Tienhoven’s impurities finally got the better of him, though. Appropriately it was the [native Indians] that caused his downfall, along with a healthy crop of peaches.

What came to be known as the “Peach War” began in September 1655, when a combined war party of Esopus, Hackensack, and Mahican Indians formed a flotilla of canoes to attack their traditional enemies, the Canarsie tribes. Stopping overnight at Manhattan, the hungry armada spied an abundant peach orchard and began picking their fill. The owner of the orchard ... didn’t appreciate the poaching and shot an Indian woman dead on the spot. News of the murder spread fast, and the [Indians] began searching the houses of New Amsterdam for the trigger-happy gunman. Soon enough they discovered the orchard keeper and shot an arrow into the man’s side, though the wound wasn’t mortal....

With Stuyvesant away from Manhattan on business, Van Tienhoven took it upon himself to confront the unruly tribes. Crying, “Murder the savages!” he led an attack against the Indians, who fled across the river in their canoes. Their own blood very much up, the tribes then turned their flotilla upon the fertile lands of Staten Island and rampaged there for three days



straight. By the time the [Indians] had cooled off, 50 colonists had been murdered and 100 women and children taken captive. The carnage also included 28 torched farmsteads, thousands of bushels of grain destroyed, and over 600 cattle killed or driven off. In a colony always deficient in funds, foodstuffs, livestock, and most especially settlers, the damage was close to irredeemable. New Amsterdam was on the verge of obliteration.

Yet again Van Tienhoven had brought calamity to the settlement, but this time not even Stuyvesant could save him. The director tried to protect his henchman, saying in his company report only that a few “hot-headed individuals” were responsible for the disaster, but the company was hearing differently from just about everyone else.... When someone discovered a series of the schout’s correspondences badmouthing the West India Company’s leadership, the company could no longer countenance its wayward servant. “On account of the manyfold complaints,” the West India Company ordered Stuyvesant to dismiss Van Tienhoven with prejudice, declaring, “Whoever considers his last transactions with the savages will find that with

clouded brains filled with liquor, he was the prime cause of this dreadful massacre.”

In addition to being sacked, Van Tienhoven was ordered to face a court of inquiry, but the schout scented which way the wind was blowing and chose not to offer a defense. Instead, in November of 1656 (and with his wife expecting their fourth child), Van Tienhoven disappeared, his bloated visage never recognized in the New or Old World again. Though Van Tienhoven wasn’t the type to commit suicide, his trail ended where it began, with his hat and cane floating in the chilled waters of the river. Van Tienhoven had a younger brother (also a devious character) who fled the colony around this time. The brother later resurfaced in Barbados, and while it’s possible Cornelis also escaped to the Caribbean, neither proof nor rumor ever reported his unmistakable presence in those sugary climes.... Whatever befell him, Cornelis Van Tienhoven’s fate remains a mystery to this day. Not so mysterious is the fact this little-known blackguard embodied the lowest aspects of the Dutch colonial experience.



*"The Fall of New Amsterdam," painted in 1932 by the American painter Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, showing Peter Stuyvesant in 1664 with residents of New Amsterdam who are pleading with him to not fire on the British who have arrived in the harbor to take New Netherland from the Dutch.*

traveled up and down the Hudson River.

The Ver Plancks bought land on Manhattan Island from Cornelis Van Tienhoven (*see box, pp. 8–13*), the husband of Maria's sister Rachel, and built a house on Pearl Street.

In 1664, when British troops showed up on the Hudson River intent on winning New Netherland for England, Abraham was one of several Dutch men who signed a petition to Peter Stuyvesant, governor of New Netherland, encouraging him to surrender to the British. They recognized that a fight with the British would have destroyed New Amsterdam. Thus, they were more interested in saving their homes than in keeping New Amsterdam under Dutch control with Stuyvesant as their leader.

Maria (Vigne) Ver Planck died around

1671, although at least one online source says 1689. Abraham Ver Planck died in 1691. By the time she died, Maria had had ten children — one by Roos and nine by Ver Planck. In 1657, Abraham and Maria's daughter Catalyntje married David Pieterse Schuyler, one of two brothers who had been among the earliest Dutch immigrants to New Netherland. David had been one of the initial settlers of what is now Albany, New York. His brother Philip settled in New Amsterdam.

## **JAN JANSEN VAN BREESTEDÉ / ENGELTJE JANS**

David and Catalyntje (Ver Planck) Schuyler's son, David Davidtse Schuyler married Eltsje Rutgers. Eltsje was a great-granddaughter of another of New Amsterdam's earliest settling couples



## “SLAVERY IN NEW AMSTERDAM”

*Enslavement of Africans was a reality of life in New Amsterdam, almost from the settlement’s founding. For the first several years, slaves were typically owned by New Amsterdam’s governing body, the Dutch West Indies Corporation, rather than by individual Dutch settlers like the Vigne, Ver Planck, and Van Breestede families. The following excerpt from History of American Women’s “Slavery in New Amsterdam — The Years: 1625 Through 1664” explains the realities of slavery in 1600s New Netherland, up until the British took control of the colony in 1664 — after which slave trade and ownership became much more pervasive in New York:*

### DUTCH NEW AMSTERDAM

In 1624, the Dutch West India Company (DWIC) began settling the colony of New

Netherland, the territory granted to the Dutch West India Company in 1621 by the government of Holland. It stretched from Manhattan to Albany along both sides of the Hudson River, and eventually included the areas now known as New York and New Jersey, and parts of Delaware and Connecticut. This colony was set up as a business, and its main goal was to make money for the DWIC by trading beaver pelts and other goods with Europe.

In 1625, the DWIC established the village of New Amsterdam, the main settlement in the Colony at the tip of Manhattan Island. There weren’t enough colonists to do the work of establishing a new colony. The Company tried to persuade more Dutch people to come to the colony, but few were interested. They tried to make local Native Americans work, but they ran off and returned to their villages. Bringing the captured African seamen to New Amsterdam seemed to solve these problems. Africans could be forced to work, and they couldn’t escape and go home.

The use of African slaves began in the 1400s, when Europeans began buying prisoners of war from African kings. By the time New Amsterdam was founded, Europeans were used to the idea of African slaves. Europeans believed that people were born to a certain role in life, whether they were white or black, male or female, rich or poor. They saw that



*“The First Slave Auction at New Amsterdam,” painted in 1895 by the American illustrator Howard Pyle.*

as the natural order of things. They believed that white Christians, especially white Christian men, were meant to be in control and lead the world toward greater progress. The world in the early 1600s was not sharply divided between people who were free and people who were not. There were many people in Europe and the American colonies who weren't really free: indentured servants under contract for several years, apprentices who were bound to a tradesman while they learned a skill, and tenants farming land owned by a landlord.

### **AFRICANS AT NEW AMSTERDAM**

Circa 1626, eleven bondsmen were brought to New Amsterdam. They had Portuguese names and were probably captured from Portuguese or Spanish ships. In 1627, the first three enslaved women were brought to New Amsterdam, which was still little more than a muddy village with thirty wooden houses and a population of less than two hundred people.

For much of the Dutch colonial period, the slaves were owned directly by the Dutch West India Company, and they worked for the colony. They cleared land, planted and harvested crops, and built houses, roads, and bridges. They built Fort Amsterdam, cut the road that became Broadway, and fortified a wall along a path that would later be known as Wall Street. Without their work, the colony of New Amsterdam might not have survived.

The legal and social status of the enslaved Africans was originally not clearly defined. They basically followed the same laws as the white population, meaning they could own

property and testify in court, bear arms in emergencies, attend church, and marry. Soon, individual Dutch families began buying slaves, and that pattern continued into the British colonial period.

By the late 1630s, there were 100 enslaved men and women in New Amsterdam, amounting to one-third of the population. Other colonies owned slaves, too, but there were many more in New Amsterdam. Africans in New Amsterdam wore Dutch clothing, learned the Dutch language, and adopted their customs. They were married in the Dutch church, and their children were registered with the company. The Colony passed very few laws to control its slaves.

In 1635, the Dutch West Indies company hired a special overseer to supervise the work of "the Negroes belonging to the company." Separate slave quarters were established along the East River north of the main settlement.

### **HALF-FREEDOM**

As the settlement became well established, the need for slaves diminished, and the eleven men who had first arrived in the Colony petitioned the Company for their freedom. In 1644, these men and their wives received conditional liberty, sometimes called *half-freedom*. They received the title to land on the outskirts of the colony, where they would act as a buffer against attack from Native Americans. In return, they must pay an annual tax in produce and work for the colony whenever their labor was needed. Their children, however, would remain forever enslaved.

## LAND OF THE BLACKS

But they no longer had to live like slaves. They farmed their own lands, sold their produce, and kept the profits beyond what they owed in tax. Black farmers soon owned a two-mile long strip of land from what is now Canal Street to 34th Street in Manhattan. The sizes of the individual land grants varied, but most were from two to eight acres. These former slaves created the first black community in Manhattan, on farms granted them in the *Land of the Blacks*, located where Washington Square is now. The total area was more than 130 acres, or about 100 city blocks.

## PETER STUYVESANT

In 1647, Peter Stuyvesant became the Director General of New Netherland. His job was to bring order to the loosely-structured colony. Because of labor shortages, Africans gained access to skilled trades. Under Stuyvesant's direction, enslaved Africans labored as caulkers making boats watertight, blacksmiths, bricklayers and masons. Some were welcomed into the Dutch Reformed Church, where they were offered education and religious training, and were allowed to marry and baptize their children.

Stuyvesant corresponded with company officials in the Netherlands about the need to import more enslaved Africans. He increased the number of enslaved Africans in the colony, and became the largest individual owner of enslaved Africans in the colony. The direct trade in slaves between New Amsterdam and Africa began in 1655, with the arrival of a ship containing 300 enslaved Africans. In 1660, Stuyvesant supervised what was probably Manhattan's first public

auction of human beings.

By 1664, the African population had increased to 800 people, ten percent of the total population of New Netherland. In New Amsterdam, 375 Africans made up about a fourth of the population. A 1664 tax list showed that approximately one out of eight citizens in New Amsterdam owned slaves, including a number of large plantations in Hempstead in what would become Queens County.

## ENGLISH NEW YORK

In 1664, the English seized New Amsterdam and integrated it into their own imperial economy of sugar and slaves. Trading in food, wood, and animals with the British West Indies enriched the city's merchants. Slave numbers grew after 1700 as merchants, farmers, and artisans relied more and more on their labor. By the 1740s, 20% of New York's inhabitants were slaves and two out of every five households had at least one. Repressive laws were written to control them but the enslaved conspired, rebelled, and ran away relentlessly.

Dutch New Netherland came under British control in 1664. The colony and the settlement on Manhattan Island were re-named New York in honor of James II, the Duke of York. James was a major shareholder in the Royal African Company, which held a royal monopoly on the British slave trade. With the British in power, slave trading vessels were granted port privileges, and a slave market was established on Wall Street near the East River docks. Laws were passed to control the status and behavior of enslaved Africans, and their lives became more regulated.



— **Jan Jansen van Breestede and Engeltje Jans.**

Van Breestede was born around 1596 in Bredstedt, in southern Schleswig (then part of Denmark, but now part of Germany.) His father is believed to have been a Dutch merchant. In 1621, Jan Jansen van Breestede married Engeltje Jans in Bredstedt.

Online sources disagree on when Van Breestede sailed to New Amsterdam, with some claiming 1624 and others claiming 1636. Circumstantial evidence suggests that he was an enterprising merchant like his father and came to New Amsterdam to be one of the first businessmen to take advantage of exciting new opportunities in New Netherland. He likely was an employee of the Dutch West India Company.

Jan and Engeltje Van Breestede had five children. The eldest, Elyse, married Hendrick Jochemse Schoonmaker, one of the early Dutch settlers of Wiltwyck (now Kingston, NY) (*see profile , The Establishment of New Netherland: III – Wiltwyck (Kingston)*). Tryntje, the third child and second daughter, married the immigrant Rutger Jacobse. While the couple owned property in New Amsterdam, they made their primary home in the northern New Netherland settlement of Fort Orange (now Albany). The descendants of Rutger Jacobse and Tryntje Van Breestede assumed the family name of Rutgers.

Jan Jansen Van Breestede died in early 1641. Later that year, his wife Engeltje remarried, taking an Egbert Wouters as her second husband. Engeltje died sometime after May 1673.



Two modern-day sites in lower Manhattan on land owned by Abraham Ver Planck c. 1660 — above, on the north side of Bridge Street between Whitehall and Broad Streets; right, on Pearl Street, just below Wall Street.



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