

4th Grade Manhattan Purchase Inquiry

What's the Real Story Behind the Purchase of Manhattan?



Alfred Fredericks, painting depicting the sale of Manhattan, *Purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit, 1626*, 1926. © Ivy Close Images / Alamy

Supporting Questions

1. Why were the Dutch interested in the region that became known as New Netherland?
2. How would both the Dutch and the Natives benefit from the sale and purchase of land in Manhattan?
3. How are the stories told about the sale of Manhattan similar and different?



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What's the Real Story Behind the Purchase of Manhattan?

New York State Social Studies Framework Key Idea & Practices	4.3 COLONIAL AND REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD IN NEW YORK: European exploration led to the colonization of the region that became New York State. Beginning in the early 1600s, colonial New York was home to people from many different countries. Colonial New York was important during the Revolutionary Period. ✓ Gathering, Using, and Interpreting Evidence ✓ Chronological Reasoning and Causation ✓ Comparison and contextualization
Staging the Question	Examine the painting by Albert Fredericks that presents the traditional view of the Manhattan purchase. Then read a contemporary article that points out the myths behind that view.

Supporting Question 1
Why were the Dutch interested in the region that became known as New Netherland?
Formative Performance Task
Develop an advertisement directed at Dutch investors or colonists encouraging them to come to North America
Featured Sources
<p>Source A: “Why Was the Colony of New Netherland Initially Founded?”</p> <p>Source B: Map bank: Two views of the New Netherland region</p> <p>Source C: Excerpt from Provisional Regulations for the Colonists adopted by the Assembly of the Nineteen of the West India Company</p>

Supporting Question 2
How would both the Dutch and the Natives benefit from the sale and purchase of land in Manhattan?
Formative Performance Task
Create a T-chart that lists what the Dutch and Natives expected to gain from the sale and purchase of Manhattan
Featured Sources
<p>Source A: Peter Schaghen letter reporting the purchase of Manhattan</p> <p>Source B: Excerpts from Instructions / Further Instructions for Willem Verhulst</p> <p>Source C: Excerpts from Letter from Isaack de Rasiere to the Amsterdam Chamber of the West India Company.</p> <p>Source D: Indian Deed To The Directors of the West India Company for Land on Long Island</p>

Supporting Question 3
How are the stories told about the sale of Manhattan similar and different?
Formative Performance Task
Write one claim with evidence about the similarities across the sources and one about the differences
Featured Sources
<p>Source A: Excerpt from <i>History of the City of New York: Its Origin, Rise, and Progress</i>, Vol. 1</p> <p>Source B: Excerpt from <i>History of the Rise of New York in the Seventeenth Century</i>, Vol. 1</p> <p>Source C: Excerpts from “The Dutch, Munsees, and the Purchase of Manhattan”</p>

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical sources while acknowledging competing views
Taking Informed Action	<p>EXTENSION Thinking as a historian-detective, list the questions that remain around the purchase of Manhattan and what evidence would be useful to answer them.</p> <p>UNDERSTAND Discuss the images on the base of the Netherlands Memorial flagpole in light of this inquiry.</p> <p>ASSESS Brainstorm possible actions individuals, groups, or a class might take around the Netherlands Memorial flagpole base.</p> <p>ACT Select from the possible options and act accordingly.</p>



Overview

Inquiry Description

On the surface, the compelling question for this inquiry, “What’s the real story behind the purchase of Manhattan?” asks students to explore the background to the story of the sale of Manhattan to the Dutch in 1626 for \$24 of beads and trinkets. A closer look at the story reveals a range of myths and unknowns including who was involved in the transaction, what the transaction actually meant, and what was exchanged. In fact, the only contemporary evidence that the sale ever took place is in a document found in the Dutch National Archives—the Peter Schagen letter written in November 1626 (though a statement by English Governor Francis Lovelace in 1670 confirmed the sale). Exploring this letter and the many other sources of information about the sale offer students a glimpse into the world of historical evidence, a world in which, as much as we might like, conclusive answers prove elusive. Teachers and students should note that, although the supporting questions and tasks ask about the perspectives of Native Americans at the time, there are no historical sources that record their views. Inferences can be made from the Dutch documents, but teachers and students will want to be aware that absence of sources can influence the interpretations that we develop of the past.

In addition to the Key Idea listed earlier, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understandings:

- 4.3b Colonial New York became home to many different peoples including European immigrants, and free and enslaved Africans. Colonists developed different lifestyles.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take three to five 30-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries in order to meet the needs and interests of their particular students. Resources can also be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

Structure of the Inquiry

In addressing the compelling question “What’s the real story behind the purchase of Manhattan?” students work through a series of supporting questions, performance tasks, and sources in order to construct an argument supported by evidence while acknowledging competing views.

Staging the Compelling Question

To stage the Compelling Question, students can be invited to consider the difference between a myth and a real, or more accurate, story from history. Teachers can introduce the “myth” usually associated with the purchase of Manhattan by having students examine the painting by Albert Fredericks (painted in 1926, the event’s 300th anniversary). Teachers should encourage students to identify the different components of the illustrated story (e.g., Who is involved? How do they seem to feel about each other? What are they doing? What items do you see in the

picture? Where is it taking place?). They can then have students read Peter Douglas’s “Illustrating the Manhattan Purchase” to understand the mythical elements of the traditional story. Teachers can then tell students that the inquiry will help them decide what really happened at the purchase of Manhattan.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“Why were the Dutch interested in the region that became known as New Netherland?”—asks students to begin building their understanding of Dutch settlements in North America. The formative performance task asks students to create an advertisement directed at Dutch investors and colonists encouraging them to come to North America. The featured source is a secondary account of Dutch colonization, a bank of maps showing the locations of Dutch-controlled areas, and a set of regulations from the Dutch West India Company to their colonists.

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“How would both the Dutch and the Natives benefit from the sale and purchase of land in Manhattan?”—directs students to examine the intentions of each side of the exchange. Featured Source A is the Peter Schaghen letter (and translation) offering evidence of the purchase. Featured Source B is a set of instructions to the leader of the New Netherland settlement with regard to interactions with the Natives while Featured Source C is a letter from a Dutch settler describing his interactions with Natives. Featured Source D is a deed or contract between Natives and the Dutch for a piece of land across the East River from Manhattan. The formative performance task asks students to construct a T-chart that lists what the Dutch and Natives might have expected to gain from the sale and purchase of Manhattan.

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“How are the stories told about the sale of Manhattan similar and different?”—asks students to investigate the various “stories” around the purchase of Manhattan. The first source highlights the mythical view that Manhattan was purchased for approximately \$24 worth of beads. The second two sources offer different perspectives on the sale from more contemporary perspectives. The formative performance task asks students to write two claims supported by evidence—one that identifies similarities across the sources and one that identifies the differences. (NOTE: Teachers should be prepared for students to react to the Van Rennselaer’s use of the term “savages” to refer to Native Americans. They should have students notice the date of the excerpt and think about why she might have used that term then.)



Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have examined the reasons why the Dutch emigrated to North America, where they settled, and what is known and unknown about the purchase and sale of Manhattan Island. Students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their ideas. In this task, students construct an evidence-based argument responding to the compelling question, "What's the real story behind the purchase of Manhattan?" It is important to note that students' arguments could take a variety of forms, including a class discussion or combination of drawing and writing.

Students' arguments likely will vary, but should include as many of the following story components as follows:

- The Dutch were interested in purchasing the land because they wanted to establish a permanent settlement on Manhattan
- The Dutch recognized that the Natives owned the land and were willing to offer things that the Natives wanted
- The Natives knew that the Dutch had items that would be useful to them; certain kinds of metal products and cloth (duffels) were prized by the Natives
- The Natives and the Dutch may have had different perceptions about what was involved in a property transfer.
- Both sides probably signed a document (deed), but it no longer exists and so it is hard to tell what the real story is.

Students could adapt the arguments by engaging in an exercise where they think like a historian-detective. In doing so, they can list a set of questions that remain around the purchase of Manhattan and consider what evidence would be useful in order to answer those questions.

Students have the opportunity to Take Informed Action by examining a memorial to the Dutch influence on New York after completing the inquiry. To begin the sequence, teachers should show a picture of the Netherlands Memorial flagpole with a description of the image of Peter Minuit handing over a string of beads to a Native American and asking them to brainstorm what they think the memorial represents and what questions they would like to have answered about it. Students demonstrate that they *understand* by discussing the images on the flagpole base in light of the things they have read and discussed throughout the inquiry. They show their ability to *assess* by brainstorming possible actions that individuals, groups, or the class might take regarding the imagery found on the Netherlands Memorial flagpole base and its meaning (e.g., write a letter to the New York City Parks Commission stating a perspective on the value of the memorial, designing a new memorial and submitting it for approval by the Commission, or creating a historical marker to go beside the memorial). Students can then *act* by committing to and carrying out their preferred decision as individuals, as small groups, or as a class.

Staging the Compelling Questions

Featured Source

Source A: Alfred Fredericks, painting depicting the sale of Manhattan, *Purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit, 1626*, 1926.



Alfred Fredericks, painting depicting the sale of Manhattan, *Purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit, 1626*, 1926.

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Staging the Compelling Questions

Featured Source

Source B: Peter Douglas, description of the problem with the idea that Manhattan was purchased with beads, “Illustrating the Manhattan Purchase” (excerpts), no date

ILLUSTRATING THE MANHATTAN PURCHASE

By Peter A. Douglas

If you know anything about the Dutch acquisition of Manhattan in 1626 you’re sure to be familiar with the tenacious myth that Peter Minuit paid the Indians with beads and baubles. One of the reasons for the longevity of this fable is surely the number of descriptions of this event over the last century and a half. In addition to the accounts in history books and fictional works, there are numerous artistic depictions of the celebrated meeting. These contain various bogus elements, the main one being a chest brimming with cheap trinkets that the Dutchmen are displaying to the natives as payment for their land....

An example of these illustrations that contains a lot of detail is Alfred Fredericks' (d. 1926) painting Purchase of Manhattan Island by Peter Minuit, 1626. This shows a beach scene where there is a gathering of native inhabitants of Manhattan beneath a tree. Some are wearing out-of-place many-feathered war bonnets and richly decorated and fringed garments. They are being shown strings of beads, various jars, bowls, a small casket, and a candlestick. Many of these riches spill decoratively out of a chest at the feet of a bearded and mustachioed Dutchman holding a document, presumably Peter Minuit, and presumably the deed for the sale of Manhattan. He is gesturing towards the lavish and glittering display, some of which has been removed from the chest and is set out on a cloth on the sand. His kneeling companion is proffering an embroidered tasseled cloth to the impassive Indians, who seem as yet unconvinced by these strangers in funny hats. Seated in the foreground, two natives, one clutching a pipe, discuss the curious visitors. In the background we see a large ship from which a small boat has beached, its crew hauling up another heavy chest.

© New Netherland Institute. Used with permission. <http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/more-historical-fun/illustrating-the-manhattan-purchase/>.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source A: Dennis J. Maika, description of the founding of New Netherland, "Why Was New Netherland Initially Founded?" 2015

Why Was the Colony of New Netherland Initially Founded?

By Dennis J. Maika

The initial settlement of New Netherland was created for reasons that were very different from those that motivated the English and French. In many ways, the Dutch colony's early years were unlike what was experienced by other European colonies in North America

In the late 1500s, the European territories or "provinces" known as "the Spanish Netherlands" revolted against Spain. Seven of the northern provinces joined together to form a representative government and declared their independence from the Spanish king. This new Dutch Republic (also known as the United Provinces of the Netherlands, or the Netherlands for short) then fought a long war for its independence from Spain. The Dutch officially gained their freedom in 1648.

In 1609, after many years of fighting, Spain and the Dutch Republic agreed to a twelve-year truce. That same year, Henry Hudson sailed to North America on his voyage of discovery. During those twelve years of peace, Dutch merchants explored the area that was known as New Netherland. They traded with the Natives and realized the area's rich potential.

When the truce ended in 1621, the Dutch West India Company was created to continue the fight against Spain. They attacked Spanish colonies around the world and captured Spanish ships that were carrying gold and silver. The new company operated as a "monopoly," with complete control over all trade that took place in areas under Dutch control in Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and in the New Netherland portion of North America. The chance to make a profit from so many new trading opportunities encouraged many Dutch to invest in West India Company stock.

At first, trade and war were the most important goals of the Dutch West India Company. Within a few years, however, some Company leaders wanted to build an agricultural colony to support their trading goals in New Netherland. This new strategy required settlers. Since many Dutch people in the Netherlands had a good life, it was difficult to find people who wanted to move to New Netherland. The West India Company turned to a group known as "Walloons," French-speaking people who had fled their homeland in what is now Belgium and came to the Dutch Republic. These "Walloons" became the first permanent settlers in New Netherland. In the next forty years, they were joined by many other people of various ethnic groups who settled in the Dutch colony.

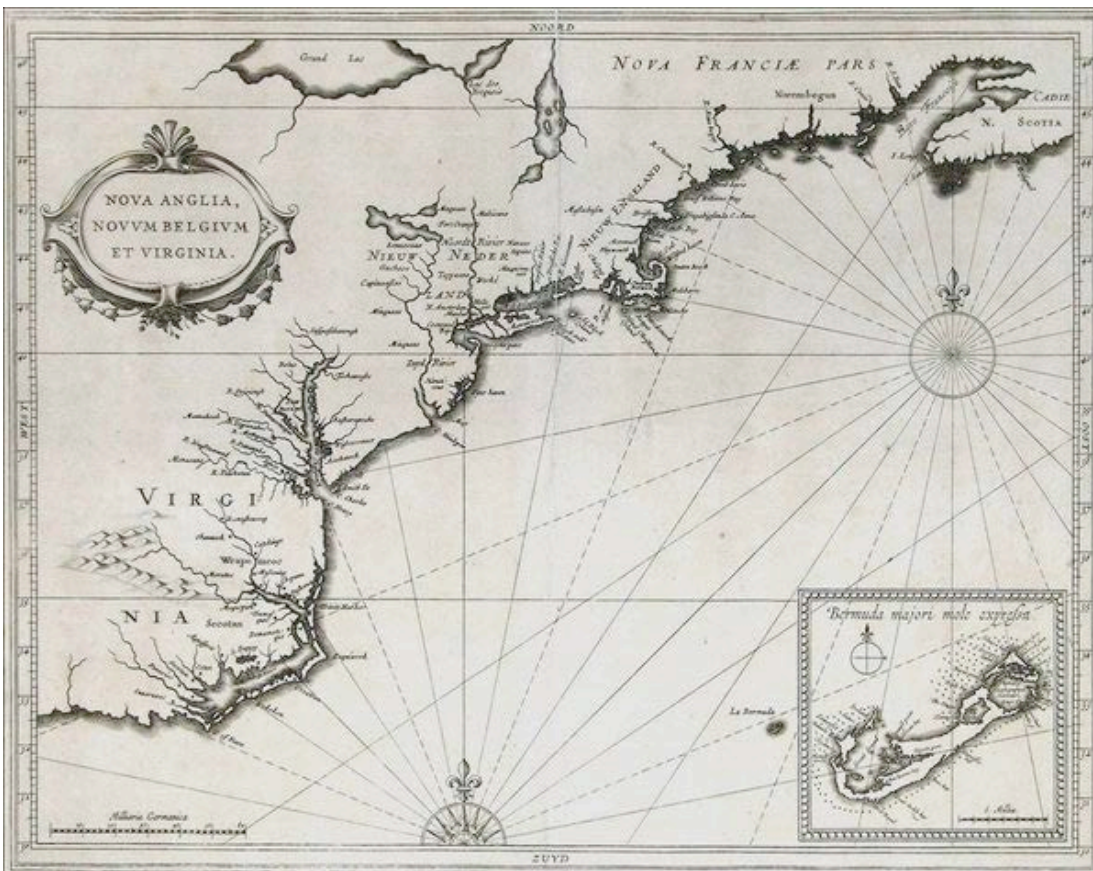
© New Netherland Institute. Used with permission. <http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/education/for-students/fun-re/what-was-new-netherland/why-was-the-colony-of-new-netherland-initially-founded-by-the-dutch-west-india-company/>

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source B: Map bank: Two views of the New Netherland region

NOTE: This is the first printed map of New Netherland; it was first published in Leiden, a city in the Netherlands. It was made just a few years after the purchase of Manhattan. For the first time, New Amsterdam and Manhattan are included on a map. Places that can be easily identified are Manhattan (as a island), Long Island (“Lange Island” in Dutch) and Cape Cod. This map also shows, from south to northeast—Virginia, New Netherland, New England and New France: Notice how similar the Dutch work “Nieuw” is to the English word “New.” Words in the upper left are in Latin: Nova Anglica (New England), Novum Belgium (New Netherland), and Virginia.



Map 1: Nova Anglia Novum Belgium et Virginia, from *Nieuwe Wereld, Beschrijvinghe van West-Indien* (Description of West India), 1630, Leiden

© New Netherland Institute. Used with permission. <http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/charting-new-netherland-1600/the-maps/nova-anglia-novum-belgium-et-virginia-1630/>.

NOTE: This map offers a very different perspective from the previous one: This is perhaps the way a sailor would view his sailing from Europe to the North American coast. It was printed in color and is beautifully illustrated. Notice the many different local animals (e.g., deer, foxes, beavers, rabbits), several Native Americans in canoes, European sailing ships, and two fortified Native villages. New France, New England, New Netherland, and Virginia are set off from each other by a colored border. Once again, New Netherland is referred to as Nova Belgica, a Latin phrase.



Map 2: Nova Belgica et Anglia Nova, from *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, 1635, Amsterdam

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Supporting Question 1

Featured Source

Source C: Provisional Regulations for the Colonists adopted by the Assembly of the Nineteen of the West India Company (excerpts), March 28, 1624.

NOTE: The Assembly of Nineteen were the men who controlled the Dutch West India Company in the Netherlands. The Company was first organized in 1621 as the Netherlands' war for independence from Spain was starting up again after a 12-year truce. The Company created many rules to ensure that its new colony would be protected and prosper. In the rules listed here, the Company identified several ways in which profits might be made by the colonists who went to New Netherland.

#4. They shall take up their permanent residence at the place to be assigned to them by the Commander and his Council and use all diligence to fortify the same by common effort, likewise erecting in common the necessary public buildings and establishing trade relations as far as possible....

#8. The colonists shall be free to carry on and prosecute the inland trade without objection on the part of any one, on the express condition that they shall sell the goods they have purchased or collected to no one but the Company's agents....

#9. They shall also be free to engage in all sorts of sport of fowling, hunting, and fishing....

#10. All minerals, newly discovered or still to be discovered mines of gold, silver, copper or any other metals, as well as of precious stones, such as diamonds, rubies, and the like, together with the pearl fishery, shall be allowed to be worked by the Company's men only....

#17. They shall at first plant and sow on the lands allotted to them such products and crops as the Commander and his Council shall order, without making any change therein for any private reason, on pain of being punished by the Council for any contravention thereof, according to the circumstances.

#18. They shall take special care, whether in trading or in other matters, faithfully to fulfill their promises to the Indians or other neighbors and not to give them any offense without cause as regards their persons, wives, or property, on pain of being rigorously punished....

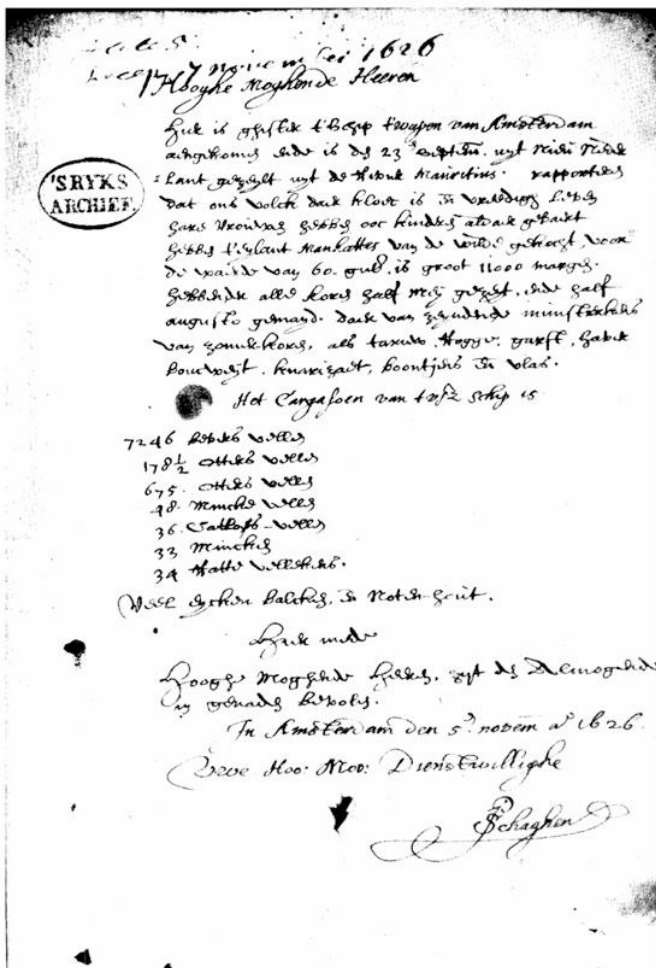
Documents Relating to New Netherland 1624-1626 in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Translated by A. j. f. Van Laer, 1924. Available at Ancestry.com: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nycoloni/huntdoca.html>.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source

Source B: Peter Schaghen, letter describing the sale of Manhattan (original and translation), November 7, 1626

NOTE: Peter Schaghen was a representative of the Dutch Government who was on the governing board of the West India Company. He met and talked with the crew and passengers on the ship "The Arms of Amsterdam" after they arrived from New Netherland in the fall of 1626. Schaghen reported to the directors of the West India Company that Manhattan Island had been purchased for the value of 60 guilders. The "River Mauritius" was an early name given to the Hudson River. The Schaghen letter is the earliest reference to the purchase of the island that would become the center of New Netherland.



Original letter from Peter Schaghen describing the sale of Manhattan.

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Translation of Schaghen Letter

Rcvd. 7 November 1626

High and Mighty Lords,

Yesterday the ship the Arms of Amsterdam arrived here. It sailed from New Netherland out of the River Mauritius on the 23d of September. They report that our people are in good spirit and live in peace. The women also have borne some children there. They have purchased the Island Manhattes from the Indians for the value of 60 guilders. It is 11,000 morgens in size [about 22,000 acres]. They had all their grain sowed by the middle of May, and reaped by the middle of August They sent samples of these summer grains: wheat, rye, barley, oats, buckwheat, canary seed, beans and flax. The cargo of the aforesaid ship is:

7246 Beaver skins

178½ Otter skins

675 Otter skins

48 Mink skins

36 Lynx skins

33 Minks

34 Muskrat skins

Many oak timbers and nut wood. Herewith, High and Mighty Lords, be commended to the mercy of the Almighty, In Amsterdam, the 5th of November anno 1626.

Your High and Mightinesses' obedient, P.Schaghen

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Supporting Question 2

Featured Source

Source B: Dutch West India Company, guidelines for dealing with the Native peoples, Instructions and Further Instructions for Willem Verhulst (excerpts), January, 1625 and April, 1625

NOTE: Two sets of instructions were given by the Dutch West India Company to Willem Verhulst, the company's director in New Netherland. In the excerpts here, notice how the Company directs Verhulst to act when he arrives in Manhattan and comes in contact with the Native peoples.

Instructions: January 1625

In case any Indians should be living on the aforesaid island or make any claim upon it, or upon any other places that are of use to us, they must not be driven away by force or threats, but by good words be persuaded to leave, or be given something therefore to their satisfaction, or else be allowed to live among us, a contract being made thereof and signed by them in their manner, since such contracts upon other occasions may be very useful to the Company.

And for the better security of the trade and the exclusion of foreign nations, he is to consider whether it would not be practicable so to contract with the natives of the country in various districts as would make them promise us to trade with no one but those of the Company, provided that we on our part should bind ourselves to take all the skins which they could bring us upon such terms as would be considered reasonable, or at such price as we have hitherto brought them.

Documents Relating to New Netherland 1624-1626 in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Translated by A. J. F. Van Laer, 1924. Available at Ancestry.com: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nycoloni/huntdocc.html>.

Further Instructions: April 22, 1625

...Meanwhile, Commissary Verhulst, assisted by the surveyor, Cryn Fredericxsz--who is to make sketches and take rough measurements of the places that deserve chief consideration--and with such further assistance as they may need, shall investigate which is the most suitable place, abandoned or unoccupied, on either river, and then settle there with all the cattle and build the necessary fortification. And finding none but those that are occupied by the Indians, they shall see whether they cannot, either in return for trading-goods or by means of some amicable agreement, induce them to give up ownership and possession to us, without however forcing them thereto in the least or taking possession by craft or fraud, lest we call down the wrath of God upon our unrighteous beginnings, the Company intending in no wise to make war or hostile attacks upon any one, except the Spaniards and their allies, and others who are our declared enemies.

Documents Relating to New Netherland 1624-1626 in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Translated by A. J. F. Van Laer, 1924. Available at Ancestry.com: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nycoloni/huntdocd.html>.



Supporting Question 2

Featured Source

Source C: Isaack de Rasiere, letter to the Amsterdam Chamber of the West India Company (excerpts), September 23, 1626

NOTE: Isaack de Rasiere was sent to New Netherland in early 1626 by the "chamber" or section of the West India Company that was based in Amsterdam. These paragraphs are taken from a letter he wrote back to his employers. He describes an exchange he had with members of a visiting Indian tribe for beaver skins. He also explains the kind of cloth the Indians wanted and how they felt when the Dutch didn't have cloth to trade. Notice who does the hunting for furs.

...the Minquaes (Susquehannock Indians) have been here from the south, some thirty or forty strong, and have sought our friendship. In return I showed them as much friendship as I could, so that they begged me that when the season approached I would send them....a small ship, [which they could use to store their furs], which I promised to do. Thereupon they presented me with ten beavers (beaver skins) and I gave them in return a [six-foot long piece] of duffel-cloth and a small quantity of beads, two hatchets, and a few other things, so that they got fully the value back, and this was done [together] in token of sworn friendship.

I have only about 30 pieces of cloth in colors that are in demand, that is, blue and standard gray, the rest which I have are all red, whereof I can hardly sell a yard, because the Indians say that it hinders them in hunting, being visible too far off. They all call for black, the darker the color the better, but red and green they will not take. If by that time your Honors will be pleased to provide me with duffels as herein before mentioned, I hope to send back about 10,000 skins in return, and that in time for the Amsterdam fair (regular market)...In this way trade may be carried on in the most profitable way to the satisfaction of both sides, while the Indians will be all the more diligent in hunting when they see that when they have skins they can get what they want, about which the Maquaes do not hesitate to complain bitterly, saying: "Why should we go hunting? Half the time you have no cloth."

Documents Relating to New Netherland 1624-1626 in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Translated by A. J. F. Van Laer, 1924. Available at Ancestry.com: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nycoloni/huntdocf.html>.



Supporting Question 2

Featured Source

Source D: Indian Deed To The Directors of the West India Company for Land on Long Island (excerpts), August 1, 1638

NOTE: A deed is a written contract that transfers land from one person or group to another. A written deed for the island of Manhattan does not exist, but other deeds signed by the Dutch and Native Americans have survived over time. Here is an example of a deed signed by Native American chiefs and representatives of the Dutch West India Company. In this deed, the Natives received certain goods and the Dutch received a piece of land across the East River from Manhattan in what is now Brooklyn. The "Maspeachtes" refers to a natural boundary in the land; Maspeth, in modern day Queens, takes its name from this Native word.

We, director and council of New Netherland etc., testify and declare, that today, date underwritten, personally appeared before us Kakapoteyno, Menqueuw and Suwirau, chiefs of Keskaechquerem, in presence of the undersigned witnesses and declared that voluntarily and advisedly with consent of the community, for and in consideration of eight fathoms of duffels, eight strings of sewant (wampum), twelve kettles, eight adzes and eight axes and some knives, beads and awls, which they acknowledge to have received into their hands and power to their full satisfaction and contentment before the passing...they have transferred, ceded, surrendered and conveyed as lawful, true and free possession, as they...transfer, cede, surrender and convey to...the noble lords directors of the General Chartered West India Company, Chamber of Amsterdam, a certain piece of land lying on Long Island, south of Manhattan Island, reaching in length from the plantation of George Rapaeljee...a good mile and a half to the Mespachtes and in width from the East River about one mile to the thickets of the same Mespachtes....

Done on the island of Manhattan in Fort Amsterdam this 1 August 1638. Maurits Janson, Claes van Elslant. In my presence Cornells van Tienhoven, Secretary

Charles T. Gehring, editor and translator, *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*. Vols. GG, HH, & II: *Land Papers*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1980: pp. 8-9.

Available at http://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/1314/0284/1244/Volumes_GG_HH_II_-_Land_Papers.pdf.



Supporting Question 2

Featured Source

Source A: Martha J. Lamb, description of the purchase of Manhattan, *History of the City of New York*, Vol.1 (excerpt), 1877

The rocky point of Manhattan Island, near what is now known as the Battery, was, on the 6th of May, 1626, the scene of one of the most interesting business transactions which has ever occurred in the world's history. It was the purchase of the site of the city of New York. The West India Company had instructed Peter Minuet to treat with the Indians for their hunting-grounds, before he took any steps towards the erection of buildings. He accordingly made a somewhat superficial survey of the island, which had been designated in the field for pioneer operations, and estimated its area at about twenty-two thousand acres. He then called together some of the principal Indian chiefs, and offered beads, buttons, and other trinkets in exchange for their real estate. They accepted the terms with unfeigned delight, and the bargain was closed at once. The value of the baubles which secured the title to the whole of Manhattan Island was about sixty guilders, equal in our currency to twenty-four dollars. On the part of the Dutch, it was merely a politic measure to establish future amicable relations with the natives of the country, although it was subsequently made the basis of the company's claim to the territory. It was, in itself, a commonplace event; but, in its relation to what has since taken place, it assumes peculiar significance, and stands out in immortal characters as the chief starting-point of the great commercial capital of the west.

Martha J. Lamb. *History of the City of New York: Its Origins, Rise and Progress*, 1877. Public domain. Available at the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/historycitynewy05lambgoog>.



Supporting Question 3

Featured Source

Source B: Marina van Rensselaer, description of the purchase of Manhattan, *History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1, (excerpt), 1909

It has sometimes been said that Minuit cheated the savages, buying as they thought only a plot for a garden and then claiming the whole of the island. Schaghen's letter disproves this, and so does the record of the prices willingly accepted by the Indians elsewhere in New Netherland for great stretches of their soil. Even though money at that period was much more valuable than it is today, sixty guilders (about \$24) may seem a small price for an island almost twenty-two square miles in extent—thirteen miles and a half in length and two and a half in width at the broadest part. But it would have been an absurd price for a garden plot. Land, it should be remembered, was the Indians' one plentiful possession. Moreover, they were not dispossessed of their island but were only pledged, like tenants-at-will, to yield from time to time such portions of it as the white men might need - if, indeed, many of them used Manhattan as an actual abiding-place. Here and there on the island sites of Indian villages have been somewhat doubtfully identified; for the most part it seems to have been uninhabited although constantly frequented by the savages who lived on the neighboring shores. Of course Minuit gave, instead of useless money, articles that had an immense value in the Indians' eyes. Their character may be guessed from a list of the things paid seven years later for an extensive tract in the Connecticut Valley:

One piece of duffels twenty-seven ells long; six axes, six kettles, eighteen knives, one sword-blade, one shears, and some toys.

In after days such purchase lists included a greater variety of articles—needles, for instance, combs, petticoats, boxes, looking-glasses, pipes and tobacco, fishing hooks, iews'-harps, and small bells reckoned by the hundred.

Marina van Rensselaer. *History of the City of New York in the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan, 1909. Public domain. Available at the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/historyofcityofn00vanr>.



Supporting Question 3

Featured Source

Source C: Paul Otto, description of how the Dutch and Munsees each viewed the purchase of Manhattan, “The Dutch, Munsees, and the Purchase of Manhattan” (excerpts), reprinted in the *New York State Bar Association Journal*, January 2015

Tradition holds that the island was purchased with “glittering beads and baubles,” but the actual nature and content of the goods traded to the Indians for the island is unknown. It can be surmised that the Indians accepted the typical trade items. When the Dutch purchased Staten Island a few years later, they paid the Indians with “Duffels, Kittles, Axes, Hoes, Wampum, Drilling Awls, Jews harps, and diverse other small wares.” The value of the goods – 60 guilders – is documented, but here, too, tradition is misleading. Most Americans who have heard the price paid for Manhattan Island cite the figure of \$24. This figure appeared in 1846 when E. B. O’Callaghan, who had access to the recently discovered Schagen letter, published his *History of New Netherland*. It was there that O’Callaghan introduced the figure of \$24 by using current rates of conversion. Since that time, the story of Manhattan Island being sold for \$24 in trade goods has been retold and republished many, many times, leaving the original Dutch amount of 60 guilders lost in translation, as it were. But the value of the guilder or dollar in the 19th century tells us little about the actual price the Dutch paid in 1626. Even to calculate the value in dollars today, given inflation, of 60 17th-century guilders misses the point. Sixty guilders was not a large sum at the time, but neither was it minuscule. According to historian A. Th. Van Deursen, it equaled three or four months’ wages for an average artisan in the province of Holland....Sixty guilders was also the amount the Company paid a colonist (and presumably an Indian as well) for 30 beaver skins or 12 fathoms of wampum.

To the Dutch, the land was certainly valuable at the time (it would be anachronistic to consider its value today as the commercial capital of the world). The 14,000 acre island became the Company’s headquarters and the location of the Company’s farms and agricultural endeavors. Domine Michaëlius reported that “this island is the key and principal stronghold of the country, and needs to be settled first, as is already done.” In fact, since controlling Manhattan Island meant controlling the Hudson River, which reached deep into fur country, the island’s value can be understood in terms of the value of the fur trade. It is perhaps not without coincidence that Schagen’s letter reporting the purchase of Manhattan Island also reports the importation of 45,000 guilders worth of furs from New Netherland. It is possible that the Dutch attraction to Manhattan Island was also connected to the trade in wampum. The Dutch had early on discovered that wampum, or *sewant* as it was known among the Indians of Manhattan and vicinity, was highly valued by the Iroquoians and other inland tribes. These peoples exchanged various goods to coastal wampum makers for the beads. Although the heart of wampum production lay in eastern Long Island, it was manufactured throughout New York’s coastal regions.

From the Indians' perspective, sixty guilders of trade goods was of enormous value to them....The utilitarian function of the goods became important in native demand for certain products. Axes and hoes, for example, quickly became employed by Indians in place of native tools....For (Native) wampum producers...the iron drills and awls they received greatly enhanced their manufacture....Duffels - a coarse cloth - had become an important item for trade in the 1620s. The Munsees began to substitute duffels for deerskins, using it for clothing during the day and for blankets at night.

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Taking Informed Action

Featured Source

Source A: H. A. van den Eyden, granite carving depicting the purchase of Manhattan, 1926.



Depiction of a Dutch man purchasing Manhattan from a Native American for strings of beads on the base of the Netherlands Memorial flagpole, Battery Park, New York City.

Photo by David Pelland. Used by permission.