

In the Day of the Dutch

by Louise Dickinson Rich

The first Dutch who came to the New World knew exactly what they were after. They weren't looking for gold mines or farmland. They had only one thing in mind—trading with the Indians.



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But that was back in 1613. By 1626 Holland was having political and religious troubles. And so in that year, thirty Dutch families left their homeland and settled down on the island of Manhattan.

They were the best prepared of all the groups who sought homes in the New World. They brought cattle and horses, sheep and pigs, all carefully tended during the voyage so that they arrived in good condition.

Still, for some time after its beginning the colony suffered. It lacked leaders, and had too many traders and not enough farmers and home builders. The colonists lived in dugouts or bark huts. But gradually times grew better, and genuine prosperity came.

When the Dutch really felt at home, they began to build houses like those they had known in Holland. These houses, grouped about a church, a windmill, a fort, and a brewery, formed a little town, New Amsterdam.

To help supply the needs of the village, farms were laid out farther up the island. They were so neat that they looked almost unreal. The rows of vegetables were perfectly straight, with not a weed to be seen; the orchards were trim and well pruned; and the cows were scrubbed and spotless. Men farmed this way in Holland, and they saw no excuse for lowering their standards in the wilderness.

Two things about the Dutch houses were new to America. The first was the Dutch door, which is split crosswise in the middle so that the sections swing separately. A Dutch housewife could open the top half to speak to callers or to ventilate her house and still leave the bottom half shut, with no danger of a toddler

running out or of cats, dogs, or hens wandering in.

Outside the door was an uncovered platform called a *stoep*. A high-backed bench was built on each side of it, and here Dutch families sat when their work was done—the women mending, the men smoking their long pipes, and the children whispering secrets. Everybody who went by paused to chat; it made a nice ending to a busy day. The *stoep* was what we now call a stoop, a small porch.

Once the town began to grow, New Amsterdam children had a gay time. All the Dutch loved parties and made great events of weddings, birthdays, and holidays.

Sometime in December came First Skating Day—the day when the ice was officially declared safe for skaters. Then everyone strapped on skates and whizzed up and down the river. Back in Holland, skating was almost a national sport, and the Dutch brought it along with them. The children also brought another pastime: coasting on sleds.

On December 6 Sant Nikolaas came, and left gifts for good boys and girls. His servant, Black Ruprecht, was supposed to accompany him to punish those who had been naughty during the year. But the fond Dutch parents were apt to forget mischief on this feast day and gradually even Black Ruprecht was forgotten.

Then came New Year's Day, when everybody held open house. People drifted from home to home, making New Year's calls, eating too much, and having a wonderful time. And there was Pinkster Day, brought over from the old country—a time for jokes and tricks, like our Halloween.

New Amsterdam in those days was a pleasant, busy place. The children would sit in the sun at the edge of the water, watch the men unload the boats, and listen to their stories. They had a fine time talking to bearded trappers and friendly Indians and went home with their heads full of tales of the backcountry. Then they ate their suppers and went to bed in their bunks, where they heard hourly the report of the rattle watch.

The rattle watch was the first civilian police force in America. Its members walked the streets at night, watching for fires or crimes such as thievery. Every hour they reported not only the weather, but the time as measured by an hourglass. Before they made

their announcement, they swung their rattles—wooden objects much like party noisemakers, with a stick that clattered on a notched wheel.

The little Dutch children, warm and safe in their beds, could hear the watchman's voice ring out: "Twelve o'clock, full moon, and all is well."

After a time the Dutch lost New Amsterdam to the English, but they left their mark on America. Many American families and places have Dutch names, and the Dutch door and the stoop are still in use. Even Sant Nikolaas is still around—under the name Santa Claus. And the town the Dutch founded on the Hudson River has become America's greatest trade center, New York City.

CHECK YOUR READING

- 1. The first Dutch to come to the New World were looking for**
 - A gold
 - B land
 - C trade
- 2. The main reason the later Dutch settlers came to America was**
 - A troubles in their homeland
 - B a spirit of adventure
 - C the promise of great riches
- 3. Of all the groups who sought homes in the New World, the Dutch were the**
 - A most numerous
 - B best prepared
 - C worst farmers
- 4. The farms of the Dutch settlers were unusually**
 - A large
 - B neat
 - C dry
- 5. Two things about the Dutch houses that were new to America were the**
 - A rugs and curtains
 - B basement and attic
 - C door and stoop
- 6. One of the pastimes that the Dutch children brought to America was**
 - A coasting on sleds
 - B playing London Bridge
 - C skiing
- 7. The children who had been naughty during the year were supposedly punished by**
 - A Sant Nikolaas
 - B Black Ruprecht
 - C Hans Brinker
- 8. A Dutch holiday similar to our Halloween was**
 - A New Year's Day
 - B First Skating Day
 - C Pinkster Day
- 9. The first civilian police force in America was called the**
 - A rattle watch
 - B stopwatch
 - C Black Watch
- 10. Every hour the members of the force reported the**
 - A time and news
 - B news and weather
 - C weather and time