

History

Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations

The editors of this hefty volume are all eminent historians associated with the Roosevelt Study Center, which is situated in the heart of the ancient town of Middelburg, capital of the Dutch province of Zeeland and the ancestral home of the Roosevelt family that in still-recent history provided the US with two of its best-known presidents: Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The RSC specialises in the study of the United States in the period from the birth of Theodore Roosevelt to the present, and in Dutch-US relations. Consequently, Krabbendam, Van Minnen and Scott-Smith were ideally placed to undertake the massive task that this volume represents.

As the editors mention in their introduction to the volume, relations between the Netherlands, or the various territories that in relatively recent history have made up the country that now goes by that name, and the United States, or the various parts that eventually went into its making, have always been lopsided. From the beginning, that is to say from 1609, when the English navigator Henry Hudson reconnoitred and claimed for the Dutch West India Company the territories bordering on the river that now bears his name, predominantly comprising the more southerly parts of the present-day US state of New York as well as parts of present-day New Jersey, until US independence, the United Provinces, as they were then known, had the upper hand. In concrete terms, between 1609 and 1664, when the Dutch lost their North American territories to England (they were briefly recaptured in 1673, but ceded again to England in 1674 at the Peace of Westminster), the Dutch actively colonised the Hudson River Valley, or 'New Netherland', founding towns and villages with names such as New Amsterdam (renamed New York in 1664), Breukelen (Brooklyn), Vlissingen (Flushing), as well as Albany and other towns. The United Provinces were a major European power throughout most of the seventeenth century, mostly thanks to their superior navy, and although they entered the colonial race fairly late they quickly came to rival the English and the French and partially

replace the Portuguese, even occupying sizeable parts of Brazil during the same period that they were settling New Netherland.

Even though Dutch power was already in serious decline during the eighteenth century, at the end of that century the Dutch Republic still retained sufficient prestige to serve as an example to the new-born American Republic; it was also among the first to recognise the newly-independent United States, and to fund the infant nation by means of substantial loans negotiated by John Adams, later the third President of the US. From then on, though, and more and more as we near the present, the balance shifts towards the US, with the Netherlands, as the country came to be called in the first half of the nineteenth century, increasingly the junior partner. More recently, in particular, there have been times when the US has not hesitated to put its own geo-political interests first, as when it played a decisive part in gaining independence for Indonesia in 1948. Even so, as the US came to occupy first place in world politics the Netherlands has proved a steadfast supporter of US policies, and a loyal partner in NATO in particular.

The ups and downs of the US-Netherlands relationship are expertly, and almost exhaustively, detailed in the handsome volume under review: from the very first maps and images, pictorial and in writing, of the New World as disseminated in the sixteenth century in the Low Countries (which comprised present-day Belgium and the Netherlands, both of them ruled by Spain until the northern territories, thenceforth known as the United Provinces, shook off the Spanish yoke), through the period of Dutch exploration and colonisation, the gradual development of trade and diplomatic relations, the first wave of Dutch emigrants to the US in the second half of the nineteenth century, who settled mainly in the states of Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and the second wave right after WWII, the Marshall Plan, right down to the almost all-pervasive influence of American fashions and trends on Dutch culture in the second half of the twentieth century. Importantly, the book pays due attention to both "high" and popular culture, to the way painters, writers, critics as well as historians and sociologists have

looked at the US, and at how their American counterparts have regarded the Netherlands. This wealth of material, occupying more than 90 chapters, is organised chronologically into 6 sections: the first covers the colonial period and the eighteenth century up to 1782, the second the nineteenth century, the third the period between the world wars, and sections 4, 5 and 6 the period since WWII, devoted to, respectively, 'Politics and Security,' 'Economics and Society,' and 'Culture.' Chapters 4 to 6 take up by far the lion's share of the volume: more than 700 of the more than 1100 pages of text.

Obviously, much of what we find in this volume has been covered elsewhere, usually in more detail, often in books devoted specifically to such matters as Dutch naval exploration, colonisation, New Netherland, religious or cultural links, the origin and role of American Studies in The Netherlands, etc. Since all the contributors to the present volume are specialists in their own field, they duly refer to, summarise and discuss earlier work on their chosen topic. Consequently, this volume reads like a veritable encyclopedia of Dutch-US relations. Not the least of its many merits is that it also re-

mains superbly readable. For both these reasons it is to be recommended both to the general reader with an interest in one fascinating chapter of his country's history, be it that of the Netherlands or the United States, and as a "must have" research tool for all libraries, general as well as academic.

Theo D'haen

Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen, Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *NL-USA: Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2009.

[Johannes Vingboons,](#)
[View on New Amsterdam. c. 1665.](#)
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