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A Virtual Tour of New Netherland. New Netherland Project, New York State Library.

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A Virtuous, If Not Virtual, Tour of New Netherland

One of the significant achievements of the scholarship on early North American history in the past twenty years or so has been to break once and for all the grip of the English on our understanding of the colonial history of the continent. Alan Taylor's masterful synthesis, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking, 2001), and the current bestselling college textbooks, with their inclusion of the Spanish, French, Dutch, Germans, Africans, Native Americans, and others along with the English (and later British) colonists, are highly visible ways in which teachers of early American history are being forced to widen their field of vision and to convey new paradigms to students who all too often still think of the thirteen "original" colonies as the sum total of pre-Revolutionary America. But how has this monumental shift in scholarship and teaching occurred? In terms of the research that has allowed the Dutch to take a more prominent role in the story of colonial American history, the leading influence has been the New Netherland Project, a translation effort based in the New York State Library in Albany. Now more than half way toward completion of modern, accurate, and scholarly translations of the Dutch colonial records for the colony of New Netherland, the project has burst forth on the World Wide Web with a "virtual tour of New Netherland." The word "virtual" when applied to a computer application conjures images of virtual reality, that is, three-dimensional animation and perhaps sensory helmets, gloves, and other apparel that create the experience of being "actually there," wherever "there" may be. Visitors to the virtual tour of New Netherland on the New Netherland Project's web site should not expect virtual reality, however. Though two-dimensional and not

path-breaking in terms of its utilization of digital technology, the virtual tour of New Netherland is nonetheless a significant addition to the information available to teachers, students, and members of the public who may wish to know more about this colony that stretched from the Connecticut River to the Delaware Valley while centered in the Hudson Valley between Manhattan and Albany. Russell Shorto, a journalist and the author of *The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), conducted the research and wrote the text for the virtual tour. Howard L. Funk is the volunteer webmaster who created the web site, and Dr. Charles Gehring, director of the New Netherland Project, is credited as a technical consultant. Visitors to the site need at least version 4.0 browsers, such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Communicator. Clicking on the "tour guide" link on the main tour page brings one to a helpful technical page that not only compares one's browser to the minimum requirements for using the virtual tour but also gives helpful instructions about navigating the features of the tour, including links in blue and the ability to enlarge some images on the site by clicking on the magnifying glass. There is also an opportunity to leave feedback for the webmaster. Returning to the home page allows a visitor to read a short introduction to the colony, view a historic map of the mid-Atlantic region in the mid-1600s, and search the project's web site for keywords or phrases. Having read the introductory page, one can click on "Begin Virtual Tour" to proceed to the meatier sections of the site. The next choice that one must make is to click on one of six geographical areas displayed in blue

on a map of the mid-Atlantic region. These regions are Delaware River, Manhattan, Hudson River, Albany, Long Island, and Connecticut River. Clicking on one of these links will take one to a page that introduces that region of New Netherland, usually provides a historic map or image of the area, and offers additional links to more specific topics about that region. There are also useful links to the other five regions at the upper left of every page, making it easy to move from one region to another without back-tracking through several page layers. <p> On the Connecticut River page, for instance, one can read several hundred words about this region, then click on links to sites within the region: the House of Hope, Mystic, Rodenburg, and Windsor. Visiting the page for the House of Hope (present-day Hartford) allows one to learn about the Dutch outpost on the Connecticut River from 1633 to 1650, but those interested in more recent aspects of Hartford's history can click on links to "Things to do in Hartford, and around the state," the Wadsworth Atheneum, Adriaen's Landing, and the Mark Twain House. Similarly, visiting the page for Mystic takes one to a short account of the massacre of the Pequots in 1637 along with an image from and link to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center. <p> Every region, in other words, is subdivided into several pages for the Dutch-related sites within that region. One can read Shorto's text for each region and site rather quickly, then decide whether to dig deeper into the topic or perhaps even visit it in person. <p> The Albany region begins with an overview, followed by pages on Fort Nassau, Fort Orange, Rensselaerswijck, Beverwijck, and Albany. The navigation through these pages is somewhat confusing, with arrows pointing left, right, and upward at various points but with no explanation. Trial and error takes one to the next or preceding pages. Visitors to each region should encounter the same navigational tools. <p> In the Hudson River region the subtopics are Albany, Colen Donck, Esopus, Fur Trade, Half Moon, Manhattan, Mohawk River, Nut Island, Pavonia, Staten Island, and the Tribes of New Netherland. (The Albany and Manhattan links take one to these regions, not to fresh material about these cities.) Each topic usually consumes half to two-thirds of the page when one prints the screen, with text accompanied by maps, portraits, and other illustrations. The Half Moon page includes a schematic drawing of Hudson's ship along with a link to a glossary of nautical terms. <p> Manhattan is subdivided into Bowery No. 1, Broadway, Fort Amsterdam, Greenwich Village, Haarlem, New Amsterdam, and Wall Street. Here one finds links to the St. Marks Bookshop, NYC.com and its list of area bars and nightclubs, and the

email address for a man who gives "terrific, historically-centered walking tours of New York City, including Broadway." <p> The virtual tour of Long Island is essentially a town-by-town rundown of the English and Dutch towns on the island in the 1600s: Boswijck (Bushwick); Breuckelen (Brooklyn); Southold, Southampton, and East Hampton; Gravesend; Heemstede (Hempstead); Maspeth/Middleburgh/Hastings/Newtown; Midwout (Flatbush); New Amersfoort (Flatlands); New Utrecht; and Vlissingen (Flushing). This section of the virtual tour will be particularly useful for people like me who are endlessly confused by the Dutch and English town-naming system on Long Island; it is difficult to keep all the towns straight in one's mind. <p> Farthest south in the Delaware River region, one can explore these topics: Philadelphia, Fort Nassau, Fort Christina, New Amstel, Fort Elfsborg, Swaanendael, and the Half Moon at Delaware Bay (about Henry Hudson's ship). Since the Dutch competed with the Swedes for control of the Delaware Valley before the Dutch takeover of New Sweden in 1655, much of the information in this region of the virtual tour deals with Swedish sites later occupied (and renamed) by the Dutch. As in the other regions, one can follow links to current sites, such as Governor Printz Park and the reconstructed Swedish ship <cite>Kalmar Nyckel</cite> in Wilmington, Delaware. <p> The last feature of the virtual tour worth mentioning is a "timeline of the Netherlands and Scandinavia relating to North America," elements of which are randomly displayed at the bottom of the main tour page, along with a hyperlink to the entire timeline. Particularly for those lacking a background in European history, this timeline, though brief at one-and-a-half pages, will be useful background knowledge. <p> The New Netherland Project's "Virtual Tour of New Netherland," then, is not flashy but does provide a clearly written and visually engaging introduction to the history of the colony and its peoples. I would imagine the site will be useful to most anyone with an interest in the early history of the region. For me, I will consult it to refresh my knowledge of particular topics, for the illustrations, and for the links to present-day sites and institutions. For secondary and college-level teachers of American history, this site will undoubtedly help them move beyond the few stock stories (which tend to be woefully inaccurate) of Peter Stuyvesant and the "twenty-four dollar" purchase of Manhattan to better and more detailed information for their students. For the general public, there is enough information to get one started on a study of the colony and to read further, either by consulting the bibliography on another area of the New Netherland Project's web site, or by seeking out Mr. Shorto's forth-

coming book. <p> The virtual tour of New Netherland is easy to navigate for anyone with the least bit of familiarity with web sites. The information it contains reflects the latest scholarship. The illustrations are nicely produced and are appropriate supplements to the text. Perhaps as the site evolves a greater effort will be made to include women, Africans, and Indians in the tour. Currently, they are nearly invisible inhabitants, though the tour mentions few people of any sort by name. <p>

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