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Coming to Terms with Early New Netherland - New York History: 1609, Henry Hudson Revisited



Our history books tell us that Henry Hudson was the first person to discover and explore the Hudson River. The English named it waters after him when they took control of Dutch New Netherlands in 1664.

After the river's discovery, history tells us, Dutch fur traders began trading with the Natives, establishing settlements in New Netherland, including New Amsterdam at the mouth of the river which evolved into modern day New York.

This leads us to ask: Does Henry Hudson really deserve all of the credit, standing in the spotlight as a "hero" and "one of Americas' most famous explorers"? Was he alone responsible for the birth of New Netherland?

It seemed that the "Chamber of the Province of Sealand" in a letter to the "Chamber of Amsterdam" on March 14, 1609, foresaw problems with Henry Hudson before he departed:

"We have yesterday evening received your letter of the 11th of this month, and have discussed it in our meeting of today. We are very surprised to read about the strange behavior of Mr. Hudson and are of the opinion that it is not advisable to let him go on the journey. For when he already starts to mutiny under our eyes, what will he not do when he has gone on his journey? Therefore we advise you to tell him he cannot do the journey and demand that he gives back the 25 Flemish pounds given to him in advance. And if he does not in friendship gives back this money to force him to by judicial means.

The lack of trust expressed in this letter helps us better understand the 1609 voyage and some of its mysteries: Why was the crew of the Half Moon, the ship that was under Hudsons' command, half Dutch and half English? Why did Hudson not return to Holland, but instead sail to Darthmouth, England where it seems he was arrested after his arrival? These events, combined with the Dutch-English relationship in Europe at that time, provides a new perspective on the English history of the North American coast between present-day Canada and Florida. It also influences our understanding of the founding of Jamestown, the first succesful permanent settlement in America by the English Virginian Company, in 1607. Suddenly, these events seems more connected than they are generally portrayed.

It is not our intention to diminish Henry Hudson's role in history. We believe he was an explorer of the finest sort, though not one of the most successful. His role as it relates to the founding of New Netherland and New York is not to be underestimated, but is of lesser importance than many have asserted.

The real keystone for the founding of New Netherland, New Amsterdam, and New York was made possible by the establishment of the trade and trade agreements with the local Native Communities by Dutch traders and the development of those agreements into reasonable peaceful relationships. (See the first booklet in this series: *Coming to Terms with Early New Netherland - New York History: 1610-1614*)

In 1609 Hudson more or less "stumbled" upon the river. He sailed up and down its waters and then he left. It is not impossible to say that trade, specifically the fur trade, was happening before his voyage of "discovery". And to go one step further, if the fur traders had not established trade with the Natives, Hudson would have remained a footnote in history!

This booklet does not try to prove written history wrong. The aim is to provide new viewpoints for research and interpretations done in a responsible manner, and supported by primary sources and historical facts. Let us understand when, and by whom, the sources were written and published. What were the circumstances? When and by whom were these sources discovered and researched?

Let these questions initiate a dialogue and inspire new academic research. We believe this period of North American history warrants the attention.

Available both online and in printed form, *Coming to Terms with Early New Netherland - New York History: 1609, Henry Hudson Revisited* will be released in Summer 2014.

