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**THE DUTCH OF THE NETHERLANDS**  
**IN**  
**THE MAKING OF AMERICA**

Prepared and Printed by Order of  
**HOLLAND SOCIETY OF NEW YORK**  
September 1921

**WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS, L. H. D., Author**

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# The Dutch of The Netherlands in The Making of America

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## THE UNITED STATES OF THE NETHERLANDS WAS THE MODEL AND GUIDE FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Our country is a federal republic of forty-eight states, in which religion, education, the press and trade are free and of which the Supreme Court is the permanent feature. Our flag pictures both our past history and our future progress. The red and white stripes tell of the thirteen original colonies, made into an independent nation, on July 4, 1776. The stars in the blue field, increased from thirteen to forty-eight, tell of a future, in which our flag may yet have a hundred stars.

Neither our flag nor our history can be explained from European feudalism, landed nobles, empires, thrones, kingdoms, or State Churches, for we have none of these in our republic. The United States of the Netherlands (1579-1795) give the chief explanation for the flag and the form of government of the United States of America. Our second president, one of our most learned Americans, John Adams, wrote: "The originals of the two republics (Dutch and American) are so much alike that a page from one seems a transcript from the other."

In the Dutch Republic were written charters and constitutions, a district especially set apart for the Federal Government, and not belonging to any State, like our Columbia on the Potomac, a supreme court and a flag of red and white stripes. These stripes showed that each one of the seven of the United States of the Netherlands, whether large or small, rich or poor, whether small in area, like our Delaware

and Rhode Island, or large like our Empire State or Texas, had the same vote in the Senate.

When the King of Spain, their overlord, would not listen to their petition of redress, the Dutch formed a federal union in 1579 at Utrecht, and in July; 1581 issued their Declaration of Independence, nearly two centuries before our own. Over two centuries before, in 1379, in a congress of delegates, they had compelled their ruler to sign "The Great Privilege" containing the principle and guarantee of "No taxation without consent", or "representation".

In the Republic thus formed, in 1579, all religions were tolerated. Conscience and the press were free. Here the oppressed and exiled of every land found welcome and home. The free public schools, sustained by taxation, were open to all, to girls as well as boys.

The Pilgrim Fathers, cast out from England, the Walloons and Flemings, driven out of the Belgic Netherlands by the Spaniards, the Huguenot fugitives from France, exiles from Ireland and Italy, many of the British Puritan leaders, the founders of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, when persecuted by their State, Churches or peoples, received shelter in Holland. It is a striking fact that nearly every one of the military men in the American colonies before 1650 had served in the armies of the Dutch Republic. There, in a land full of modern ideas, they were educated in political, social, military and legal science.

No other country in Europe was then so free as the Netherlands, or the people more full of spirit. As our Benjamin Franklin, who, after studying the Holland Leyden jar, invented the lightning rod, wrote: "In love of liberty and bravery in defense of it she (the Dutch Republic) has been our great example". In other things also, the fathers of the Revolution and of the Constitution profited by the experiences of Holland and the other Dutch states in their federal union.

One of the troubles of federal government has always been to maintain in balance the union of all the states and prevent secession, for the strong are apt to dominate over the weak. This is done, in part, by making all the states equal in the Senate. In 1619, in the Netherlands, there was attempted secession and civil war was imminent, but their Union was preserved; for, like as in our colonies, later in 1776, the Dutch people had become, not only a league of states, but a nation.

Nearly all the words which we use in the army, concerning the flag, in patriotism, and for quick movement and lively action, are Holland in origin. There are many amusing illustrations of this, of which we give only one. Many inns in eastern England were long ago named, when Dutch and

British were allies, "The League of Seven States", after the Dutch Republic. When this was forgotten and the faded letters were repainted, a century or two afterwards, the signs read "The Leg and Seven Stars."

Among our very many inheritances from the Netherlands are some things that influence our lives every day. We have a standard gauge for roads and railways, which, from Holland and New York, has become the rule for the whole country. In driving, the English turn to the left, while we turn to the right. Many quires of paper have been filled with writing, and periodicals with print, to explain this difference in custom, which needs no explanation. Proof is better than argument. To "turn to the right, as the law directs", was the rule in the Dutch Republic.

Even today, one can read on street corners and roads, all over the Netherlands "Rechts houden", which means Keep to the right. We have read, in the written law of at least four Dutch cities, this municipal regulation. In the Middle States of America, it was a common sight during our boyhood days.

Four-wheeled vehicles were numerous in the Netherlands, long before one of these was seen in England—into which they were first imported about 1584. Before that date, carts were used, even by Queen Elizabeth for her personal belongings, while she and her ladies rode on horseback. The Pilgrims, the Dutch and William Penn's people, the Walloons and Huguenots, by way of the Republic which sheltered them, brought us more in ideas and customs from Holland than from England.

Almost all the founders of the colonies north of the Potomac sojourned in the Dutch Republic for a longer or shorter time. Even Lord Baltimore was the descendant of a Netherlander, and William Penn's mother was Dutch. One cannot read the writings of the American statesmen or scholars of the eighteenth century, Hamilton, Adams, Jay, Jefferson, Franklin, Madison and others, without seeing how well they had studied the great Dutch statesmen, lawyers, theologians, physicians and men of science, and profited by the experiences of the older country.

It was in Holland's heroic age, that our four old Middle States were settled. Washington Irving himself who wrote, in a funny way, about the Dutch of New Netherland, confessed that what many people and even writers of history took as serious history, he meant as a joke; but persons with an English cast of mind only, whether native or foreign, are slow to understand or appreciate American fun.

Such writers, as has been said, have succeeded in casting a glow over the early history of New York, that is more

humorous than luminous. One can readily realize how the Pilgrims or Puritans would have fared, if Irving had taken hold of them first, with his caricatures and delightfully funny sketches and burlesques.

Except in the minds of the uneducated or the prejudiced, the Dutch are no more "funny" than those who speak the English language. It would be as hard to understand modern civilization if we left out the Dutch Republic, as to think of our noble line of presidents without Martin Van Buren and Theodore Roosevelt, both of direct Dutch ancestry, and others with Netherland blood in them.

Most Anglo-Saxon words, of which we boast, were Holland before they were English. The word "stripe" meaning in old Dutch not a welt or whip mark, but a band of color, was used in the Netherland flag to represent their several states and so was adopted to signify our original states in our flag.

Such words as "crack", "hustle", "scout", "boss", "golf", and scores of terms relating to ships and boats, land sports, and good things to eat, like "cookies" and "waffles", are of Dutch origin; for many inventions and modern ideas were known in Holland before they were heard of in the rest of Europe. In many cases these were brought from Holland to America by the Pilgrims and Puritans, as well as by the Dutch.

St. Nicholas, the patron Saint of Netherland children, Santa Klaus, came with the first ships from Holland and still puts his gifts for children at Christmas in the stockings hung at the fire-place in thousands of American homes.

What we are to study for the Making of America is not so much what was or happened in the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth centuries, as what were the shaping influences in the formative days which made the American.

The Dutch introduced the first free public schools in America, open both to girls and boys, not boys only, in New Netherland, as early as 1628. All Americans sought to read the names of the seven Dutch schoolmasters, on the bronze tablet at the south-east corner of Washington Square, in New York City, suggested by the writer and reared by the late Dr. McCracken, Chancellor of the New York University, an institution which was built chiefly by the money of descendants of the New Netherlands.

When our Revolutionary War broke out, the Netherlands understood perfectly what it was all about. Over fifty Dutch books and pamphlets, written between 1770 and 1788, in the Athenaeum Library in Boston, show this. They said "Why! these Americans are fighting for the same reason that our fathers did; that is, in resisting unjust taxation."

So they became our allies, recognized our government, and lent us millions of money (which when repaid in 1808, amounted to \$14,000,000). During the war, fully one half of the arms, guns, cannon, powder and clothing for the Continental army came from the Dutch Island of St. Eustatius in the West Indies.

There, on the 16th of November, 1776, the Dutch governor, Johannes de Graeff, after reading the American Declaration of Independence, ordered the first foreign salute to the American flag. This was, at that date, exactly like the Dutch naval flag and without stars, though with thirteen instead of seven stripes, red and white. Rodney, the British Admiral, thought it was far more important to go and take St. Eustatius, as the source of American supplies, than to go to the aid of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown. He captured there twenty-four American ships and two thousand American sailors.

During the Civil War, no Confederate bonds were sold in the Netherlands.

When the English Universities, from 1664, were closed to all but State Churchmen, almost every one of the leaders of the English Whigs, besides Scotch, Welsh and Irish, especially those like our friends in Parliament who had opposed King George III and his Ministers, went to study in the five Dutch Universities. In one alone, at Leyden, the old home of the Pilgrim Fathers, from 1572 to 1772, five thousand students from the British Isles and America were educated. Among these was John Quincy Adams, who became President.

The Dutch Republic was the birthplace of the Laws of Nations. At the time of the Peace Conference, in honor of the great Netherlander, Hugo Grotius, called the Father of International Law, the American delegation laid a silver gilt wreath, the gift of our government, on his tomb at Delft.

In 1920, the Netherlanders led by Queen Wilhelmina, who received the visiting Americans, in her residence, celebrated during one week the stay of the Pilgrim Fathers in the Republic for twelve years, where printing was free and their books were published. There are more records in Holland of these Free Churchmen and Pilgrims, from 1580 to 1650, than in England. Almost all of these from the Dutch archives were published in 1920, a copy being given to each American delegate.

Nearly all the pictorial art in England, before 1750, was from Dutch painters, and even Shakespeare's tomb at Stratford was carved by a Dutchman. Nearly all the mechanical trades, banks and manufactures of fine goods in the United Kingdom were introduced by the Netherlanders and the drainage of the eastern counties, which turned most of the fens into fertile fields, was the work of Dutch engineers.

The Netherlanders led in commerce, exploration, enterprise and invention and it was at such a time, when they were in the van of civilization, that the Dutch settled New Netherland, that is, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, and laid the Dutch foundations in our United States.

These old "Middle States" have always been first in those modern ideas, such as freedom of religion, popular education of boys and girls, improved methods of transportation, useful inventions, and especially in those political measures which strengthen the Union and hold the country together. In short these old American "middle states" have always been the leaders in steadying and guiding the progress of the American ship of state.

The commercial greatness of New York City was begun by the Dutch and the city flag bears the colors, orange, white and blue, of William the Silent, the first stadholder, or president, of the Dutch Republic, who was called the Father of his Country.

All three of the greatest American prophets of spiritual liberty and of freedom for the mind, as well as of the body, Roger Williams, William Penn and Thomas Jefferson, were students of Dutch and took as their example the founder of the Dutch Republic, William the Silent, whom we love to compare with Washington. Roger Williams and William Penn, like most of the Pilgrims, who lived in Leyden, (1610-1620) could speak Dutch or write it. Penn especially carried out the Dutch ideas of prison reform, and fair treatment of the Indians.

The Pilgrims brought over from Holland the Dutch customs of civil marriage and the registration of deeds and mortgages, which of course the Dutch started in New York. "The Scarlet Letter", of which Hawthorne wrote in romance, is a symbol of the progress of civilization as led by the Dutch, for they substituted a capital letter to be worn on the dress in place of branding on the flesh with a red hot iron. The Dutch led Europe in prison reform. No country did or does excel the Dutch Netherlands in hospitals, organized help and charities, and they were so started in New Netherland in the earliest times.

Look at the first ships that came to American shores, and note what they stood for, and the kind of colonists that followed and came to settle. We shall find out what these people represented by the ships and flags brought with them; for as they were in Europe, so would they be in America, with the same tools in their hands, and the same ideas in their heads.

When the Turks, in A. D. 1453, took Constantinople,

they closed the overland trade routes in Asia, which continent was then much richer than Europe. So a new route by sea, to India and China, had to be found. In doing this, they discovered, after several voyages, the coast lines of the continents of Asia and Africa. The Portuguese led but the Dutch followed eastward and found Japan and Java. When Mendez Pinto wrote his book of adventures in the Far East, people thought he was a great liar. Our word "mendacious" comes from his first name. But, like Marco Polo, whom the funny fellows dubbed "Signor Millions", because in describing China he used this word often, he told much and strange truth.

It was thrilling to know that, in spite of the Turks, and without the aid of camels and caravans, but guided only by the sun and stars and "God's finger"—the magnetic needle, brought from China—men could find their way on the sea path.

Nevertheless, the time and cost of these long southern voyages, besides the heat and the dangers of shipwreck, were so great that men began to think of finding a shorter route. It was the great Netherlander, Mercator, who made the map of the world that aided men to understand geography and sail in foreign seas.

The Dutch formed the first Asiatic Society for the study of the countries, peoples and languages of the Mother Continent. Being in the van of science, valor and enterprise, the Congress, or States-General of the Republic, offered a reward of twenty-five thousand guilders (\$10,000, or about \$50,000 in the values of today) to any one who should find the North-East passage to India, around Norway and Russia.

A cold route under the Arctic circle was this compared to that over the equator and through the tropics, in the hot salt seas of the south! Could any ship plough its way past icebergs and through thousands of leagues of ice, with the Aurora Borealis by night, but with no companions but seals, polar bears and walruses?

The Dutch East India Company was fortunate in finding an Englishman, a "pilot", out of service, as a master or sea-captain was then called, named Henry Hudson. He, like some of the Dutch merchants, had made voyages to Archangel in Russia, while the Dutch sailors had been to Nova Zembla and had named Spitzbergen and other places in the Arctic seas. The very word pilot is Dutch, and the first statue raised in honor of a pilot was at Flushing in Zeeland, in 1919.

The Half Moon, or the silver crescent, which the fierce men of Zeeland, who fought for independence against the Spaniards, wore on their hats, had become a symbol of daring, valor, success and victory. So the ship fitted out for the Far East took its name from this silver badge.

The place of farewell to ships sailing for the ends of the earth was at the Shriekers' Tower in Amsterdam, which is still standing and in use. There the women gathered to weep and sob aloud, while the sailors, according to old custom, threw their hats in the water—to signify that they intended not to come back to get them again, until they had succeeded.

The Half Moon, on which these brave fellows set out, was so small, that when, in 1909, for the Hudson-Fulton celebration, a ship, of the exact size and model of the original Half Moon of 1609, had been built in Holland, the entire craft was carried on part of the front deck of a steamer of the Holland-America line.

When, in the arctic seas, the way seemed blocked by vast ice fields, floating icebergs and darkening tempests and his men were ready to mutiny, Hudson turned the ship's prow across the Atlantic, westward to find a new route to China.

So, going along the American coast from Maine to the present Virginia and turning north again and finding no passage to China a new chapter in modern history was opened when the Half-Moon entered in September 1609, the lordly river, which, never until 1664, bore Hudson's name. Going up as far as Albany the Half-Moon sent boats to where Troy now stands, but the rapids showed that China did not lie that way, so the ship returned.

A path to the Indies, had not been found, but the most important of all the Atlantic sea-gates into the North American continent had been discovered. And soon the Netherlanders began to settle there on the banks of the Great River, the River of the Mountains.

At the very entrance into New York Bay stands an island named after the federal republic, Staten, or the Island of the (Seven) States—as many in number as the stripes in the national naval flag that flew at the Half Moon's mizzen mast. At the peak was the orange, white and blue, now reproduced in the flag of the City of New York. The ensign of the Chartered East India Company flew at the other mast. The striped flag was the naval emblem of the federal republic. It was under the colors of a Republic that the Netherland settlers anchored off Manhattan.

Even before 1609, hundreds of ships had crossed the Atlantic, for exploration and discovery, for furs or fish, or for the kidnapping of slaves. Later, when commerce was well established there were pirates, buccaneers and filibusters. The usual route from Western Europe was by the way of the Azore Islands and the West Indies. These vessels had brought Spanish, Portuguese, French, English or other settlers.

In the seventeenth century was the great era of colonization, when the Dutch, Walloons, Flemings, Germans, Swiss, French, Scotch, Irish, Swedes, Finns and Africans came to dwell within the limits of the United States and to form our nation, which is not a New England or a New Netherland or a New Virginia, but a NEW EUROPE. These built up the country and made history.

The true colonists were not fur traders, fishermen or rovers who roamed the sea or were vagrants in the forests, or who went back, but those who stayed on the ground, made homes, tilled the soil and settled for good.

What did each of these exploring or colonizing ships represent? As emigrants, what did these people leave behind? What things, visible and invisible, what ideas and institutions, did they bring with them?

More enduring than tools, weapons, inventions or furniture, each set of colonists brought to America what had been in their heads and hearts and hands, and what was characteristic of the country from which they came and had long been before their eyes and in those of their fathers. The saute ideas, notions and even superstitions were landed on our shores. It was their training that was to tell.

The habits, customs and forms of government, under which they had grown up from childhood would, as far as possible, be reproduced in America. Tire American facilities, resources, climate, food and surroundings would at first influence them; but heredity would, in the long run, tell with even greater power.

The spectres of the brain, that lurked in the back of their heads, whether relating to education, religion, politics, law, social customs, dress or house furnishing, would follow with them. If in Europe they put people in prison or to death for their religion, or for what they called witchcraft, they would be likely to do the same in America.

If, in their old home, they made conscience free and put science against superstition and had public schools and free printing and cozy homes, they would have the same minds, things and customs in their new dwelling place. Their beliefs would direct their action more than food, soil or climate.

We are not to think of European people as having the ships and tools of our day; hut as they were then in the early seventeenth century. Some smart fellows did come, expecting to dig gold, to raise silk, to make tar and pitch in New York as well as in North Carolina, to get sugar from maple trees in summer as well as in winter, to conquer or make slaves of the Indians, to live like wild savages, or to get rich quickly and hasten to return home to enjoy the money they made in their selfish or vile way.

Such people, with their notions, could never have made our country, nor can such people ever turn into good Americans now. The best colonists expect to stay in the new country to which they come and do their part in obeying its laws and building it up.

Apart from the personal character of the men and women who were to lay the foundations of our republic, we are to study what each mother country or fatherland had, or had not, or could give to their children.

Even more important is it to ask what things were wanted, or could be made to work on the new continent. What have we Americans borrowed and made ours, and what have we cast away?

After a trial of two centuries or more, our fathers threw aside many European things. But what did they keep or add to with American ideas is the question which measures the influence of the different colonists or emigrants upon our country.

They found that for the new age and land in their experiments in government, religion and social life, such things as thrones, crowns, kings, emperors, royal courts, political bishops, feudalism, titles of nobility, all heraldry that meant privilege, and State churches were not wanted. They rejected the Inquisition, any interference with conscience, the ideas that religion was the affair only of men at court, education only for the favored few, taxation without representation, flags that stood not for the people as a nation, but only for kings or nobles, and the making of wars and military conscription without the consent of the people and government for the benefit of a favored few—all these they cast away.

If we ask, what today is distinctive of American civilization, we shall see what our fathers wanted and finally made the law of the land, chiefly were these: self government, public schools open to all, freedom of conscience, no interference in religion, a federal union, first of colonies and then of states, each one large or small, having an equal vote in the Senate, the seat of the nation's government separate from any state, a written constitution, a Supreme Court, the Judiciary being the permanent element in the government, and an executive elected by the people.

Almost every one of these features were, in effect, in the Republic of the United States of the Netherlands from 1581, or before, so that we borrowed more from the Dutch, for our federal system, than from any other people or country. There is scarcely one principle, or feature, in our federal system that was not in the Netherlands in 1609, when the Dutch ship, the Half Moon, anchored off Manhattan and

the Dutch settlers arrived with their ideas and customs, for they were not fugitives from their own country.

Almost everything that is distinctly and peculiarly American, seems to have originated in the Dutch Republic and was brought here, not only by the Dutch but also by the Pilgrim Fathers, the Liberal Puritans, the Walloons and Huguenots and the British Whigs, nearly all of whom had lived or studied in Holland. Every nationality has contributed great men or women, or some helpful element, to the making of the United States, but in the form of government, municipal, state and national, in what is distinctively American, we have borrowed more from the Dutch of the Netherlands than from any other people, country or social organization. These were the great ideas which the Netherlanders brought, with religious toleration and public education for all children, as well as many social customs, to our shores which aided so permanently in the Making of America and constitute so many of the foundation stones.

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the members of which are Americans—descendants in the male line of New Netherlanders prior to 1675.