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Introduction

This book is a narrative history of a colonial North American town between the time of its early settlement and the time when it can be perceived as a community in 1710. I do not take its history, however, to have been an evolution. I take its past to have been layers of time when a single site, Albany, was made and remade as a result of successive, socially constructed interpretations. The generator of change in Albany was interpretation. There was no "Albany" making its way toward today's version. Rather, there was continual reinterpretation, rediscovery, and reaffirmation (or disaffirmation) of cultural meanings. In the process, the site, or object of interpretations, underwent change. It altered as successive groups of individuals interpreted, say, its topography from 1630 to 1710 and, out of those understandings, operated upon it. It became the location of a cultured order of things.

In the same process, however, individuals underwent change. The landscape, to enlarge this example, was appropriated into meaning: it allowed individuals to influence themselves, to change, much as a novel or any text permits readers to change, however slightly. The residents' values and self-identity as well as their ambitions, images, and anxieties changed. Yet neither we nor contemporaries can ever be privy to changes that are not expressed, that are not represented. So the tale bearers of meanings, choices, and fears are the landscape, the rituals of political behavior, the religious liturgies, and the details of vernacular architecture of which we have a record. They are a people's values or self-identity set out for them in structures that must be called symbolic because they were those values re-presented. They are set out for us in the remaining artifacts.

Each of the chapters of this book takes possession of Albany at a different cross section of time – always by attending to the individuals who figured and imaged it. Facing the New World, they were people always inserting new possibilities into available combinations made up of memories, imaginings, and feelings. Their figuring cannot be caught in the word, rational. Yet it followed a set of cultural rules for the proper ordering of part-to-part and part-to-whole. In each of the chapters, I try

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to discover how Dutch men and women understood Albany at different layers of time, how they made it a particular kind of Dutch spectacle to which they felt a belonging. In Chapter 1, "Possessing the Land, 1630–1652," I have reconstructed Kiliaen van Rensselaer's changing interpretations of Albany over fourteen years. The artifacts are so dense that one may take each year as a layer of time valuable for analysis. In Chapter 3, to offer another example, I have largely used the artifacts from a single year, 1664, to reconstruct how three sets of Dutch men and women understood the surrender of New Netherland to the English. In Chapter 5, I have reconstructed how Dutch men and women – now New Yorkers – made sense of what we call Leisler's Rebellion in 1689–91.

The book presents the "possession" of Albany in chronological order. This is important for the reader. Although time is constructed by all historians as their sequencing of constructed events and is not something natural, a chronological progression that is familiar allows the story to be more pleasurably digested. However, at the same time, each chapter asks the reader to reflect upon the complexities of dealing with interpretation – for example, that written histories are not necessarily narratives of influences, that histories can be narratives of successive forms as *disjunctures* on a single geographical site. And it is in order to join readers to my own sense of both the uses and frustrations of discovering and re-presenting the interpretive acts of colonial Americans that each chapter is intended as a variation on the theme of interpreting as much as it is meant to say something about Dutch people in early upstate New York.

For this reason, the book is structured as an archeology of interpretations and experiences. If Albany's past is viewed according to a spatial mode of depth rather than a linear one of chronological progression, then it is exposed as layers of time when configurations of meanings were enacted. Albany is in fact a place better understood by its differences over time than its continuities. As it happens, it discloses its disjointed character far more than most colonial towns. From about 1614 to 1652, it was Fort Orange and the surrounding patroonship that Kiliaen van Rensselaer called Rensselaerswyck. In 1652, it became Beverwijck when Petrus Stuyvesant, acting as resident director of New Netherland for the West India Company, excised space for a town north of the fort and within Rensselaerswyck. In 1664, the conquering English changed its name to Albany. But even if the site had always been known as Albany, it would still have been, as all sites are, successive and unstable combinations of meanings hidden in the apparent stability of a proper noun. Albany, then, was a site upon which a series of individuals took different

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perspectives over time. Ours – mine as I complete this book, yours as you read it – are only the latest.

We cannot, of course, understand seventeenth-century Albany the way its Dutch townspeople did. We cannot grasp the cultural rules as they did. We can, however, use the surviving artifacts to reconstruct some of the performances that illustrated their culture. They displayed their values and self-identity in a range of behaviors, none of which is trivial to us because, in the world-in-a-grain-of-sand way, each performance was a cultural text. The trick is – even as in reading a novel or medical report – not merely to understand a phrase here or character portrayal there, a narrative sequence here or a figure of speech there, but to discover the structure.

The structure is most plainly seen in the actions that shaped and gave meaning to the landscape. As the Dutch inhabitants pushed and pulled it into proper order, they could read it as a set of symbols. It was a set of representations that assured them of their Dutchness and of "first and last things" set in proper order.

Houses, palisades, dikes, bridges, forts, and landings were all parts of the built landscape of seventeenth-century Albany. But they were parts-to-a-whole. What was the whole? What was the configuration that gave the parts proper meaning? Into what elemental order were the townspeople repeatedly fitting houses and roads, farmlands and town spaces, house lots and public buildings? I think it was caught up in *burgerlijk* (for the moment, "civic," "mercantile") and its relational opposite, *onburgerlijk*. *Burgerlijk–onburgerlijk* was the fundamental categorizing principle of the physical environment. It was also their organizing principle of "personal space, of social class, of events and actions, of cultural time." It was their central cultural metaphor.[1]

I have tried to catch that metaphor in one of my own or, rather, brought the processual element in *burgerlijk* into prominence by using the term "navigating the land." The Dutch privileged purposeful movement. Lands and seas, continents and oceans, river lands and rivers, all were merely background to movement. They put the physical environment in order by setting *burgerlijk* over *onburgerlijk*, that is, city over countryside, dynamism over stasis, change over permanence, the mercantile use of land over its mere occupancy. In ways that are set out more fully in the

1. Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches, Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas, 1774–1880* (Honolulu, 1980), 87.

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final reflective chapter, it was an image that gave a unique shape to the land in the Low Countries and New Netherland, where cities and arteries of trade were valued for allowing purposeful movement, encounter and exchange, while the countryside was less valued because it did not provide a space for those activities. It was an image in which cities and inland trade routes were prized for allowing one to navigate over the land, just as ports of call and sea-lanes allowed one to navigate over the seas.

At home, the intricately constructed canals were not like the irrigation passageways of early modern Indonesia. They were not waterways established to ensure the success of a rural economy. They amplified municipal rule, magnifying a city's well-being while enforcing the dependence of the countryside.[2] They served to enlarge a city's prosperity by multiplying its residents' opportunities to trade in commodities, in business partnerships, in the buying and selling of European cities and overseas trading stations. Yet the acts by which the Dutch people organized space were not, of course, merely economic. They were acts with a wider force of propriety. They gave moral and aesthetic satisfaction. The cities and the inland waterways that made them ports of call to one another were symbols of a physical environment set in proper order.

They were to the Dutch people's taste. By the time Albany was settled, the people of the Netherlands had vested sovereign power in great trading cities and, in the same process, had given them supremacy over the landscape. Two million Netherlanders had entrusted political rule to two thousand town councillors in the United Provinces, effectively handing them rule over the physical environment.[3] Properly sorted out, the land let the Dutch viewer celebrate a *burgerlijk* society and its political variant, republicanism.

In New Netherland, these elemental features and relationships were comparatively primitive but structurally the same. The Albany settlers were positioned at the farthest point of a trade route that began in Amsterdam and pushed its way deep in the heart of northeastern North America. But that did not diminish the force of that image. Rather, it enhanced it. New Amsterdam, Esopus (Kingston), Fort Orange (Albany), Fort Good Hope (on the Connecticut River) and Fort Amstel (on the

2. See Jan de Vries, *Barges and Capitalism: Passenger Transportation in the Dutch Economy, 1632–1839*, in *Afdeling Agrarische Geschiedenis Bijdragen* 21 (Wageningen, 1978).
3. Herbert Rowen, *John de Witt: Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672* (Princeton, 1978), 133, uses the figure of 2,000 for 1660. Using the figures of B. H. Slicher van Bath, G. De Bruin records the Dutch population growing from about 1.5 million in 1600 to 1.9 million in 1750. About 50 percent lived in Holland in the seventeenth century; see "De soevereintiet in de republiek: een machtsprobleem," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlauden (BMBGN)* (1979), 94:29.

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Delaware River) were compact ports of call along promising trade routes and were, therefore, homologous with Rotterdam, Leyden, and Zutphen in the Low Countries. And as in Europe so in New Netherland: The landscape celebrated a burghers' society and a republican one. In seventeenth-century North America, it was the only one to do so.

Comprehension of these people who created and sustained a version of the Dutch Republic in the New World will be very difficult for us English-speaking outsiders. We have inherited and now perform Anglo-American cultural ways. In encountering the Dutch in Albany, we do a common thing: We quickly rush to analogy or resemblance, making the strange familiar. We bring strangers like the Dutch into our present-day culture; we assume they made our improvisations in life. Or we make seventeenth-century Dutch colonials into seventeenth-century Anglo-Americans.

The seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Dutch and English were essentially different. They were men and women of different cultures. They knew it then. We, upon reflection, know it now. I insist upon the force of that difference and its manifold repercussions by calling on navigating the land again and again.

The extent of the difference will be shown in looking at the English conquest of 1664 and subsequent events. The English had a different central metaphor for organizing the physical environment. It was expressed in something like "landownership" or what I would call "occupying the land."

There was, then, a Dutch way of looking at land, a Dutch way of seeing a landscape and its iconographical representations. There was a Dutch way of describing and surveying it, of inscribing it on maps – of buying and bequeathing, owning and talking about it. And there was an English way. The Dutch and the English each "possessed" Albany according to their own central metaphors.

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1

Possessing the Land, 1630–1652

In 1884, Arthur James Weise described the settlement of Albany in the early seventeenth century. He told a story that differed little from those we associate with colonization elsewhere in northeastern North America. On the bank of a river, "where a narrow, verdurous plain lay pleasantly sheltered by the westward hill," he wrote, "the little band of Walloons with a few Dutch freemen disembarked." The May day of 1624 was one of quiet serenity, he thought, and in the warm sunlight, the colonists began to explore places where "the hearth-stones of their new homes were to be laid."

The colonists wandered "speculatively" over corn fields abandoned by the natives. They soon occupied land "to cultivate" and "began the humble house building." They constructed bark cabins and "with resolute hearts and active hands began to till the land." As they did so, "the men in the service of the West India Company were constructing, near the river, a small log-fort."

Meanwhile the colonists sowed wheat and rye. "Active housewives" began caring for small vegetable gardens. "The warm summer's sun quickly germinated the seed in the fertile fields" and soon too "upon the tables of the settlers appeared the productions of their gardens – the first returns for their laborious cultivation of the virgin soil of New Netherland."[1]

The images that hold our attention here are those of the discovery of land and then the bonding of men and women to it as agriculturalists. They capture the New Netherlanders in activities that seem natural or universal in character or, if not that, then predictably European. As men who brought the land under a farmer's scrutiny, who (some of them) went about selecting house sites out of a sense of being freemen, and whose interest was to await the germination of seed in "fertile fields," they seem to recapitulate the acts by which English settlers first made

1. Arthur James Weise, *The History of the City of Albany, New York, from the Discovery of the Great River in 1524, by Verrazzano, to the Present Time* (Albany, 1884), 21–4.

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sense of Plymouth, Shawmut, and Jamestown. That was, of course, not the case. The men and women who came to the lands of the upper Hudson River did not act out of universal rules, but out of seventeenth-century Dutch culture. This story of their settlement's earliest years will be constructed by discovering Dutch meanings of origins, beginnings, and possession.

Within Weise's description of the landing – though underdeveloped because he thought it had negligible evocative force – there is a picture of "the men in the service of the West India Company . . . constructing, near the river, a small log-fort." As Weise presents it, the task they were undertaking there was an adjunct to the larger, more richly symbolic, project of settling agricultural land. Yet Weise had the significance of the activities backward. The men who were tillers of the soil (the *boers*, the farmers) were adjuncts to the Company and its objective at the fort: trading. They were to victual whatever number of soldiers and traders might live within the fort. Little more.

If the proper context for the colonists was the fort, the fort itself was set within the context of Dutch exploration along 't Noordt Rivier since 1609. Its forerunners were the ships of Henry Hudson, Cornelis Jacobsz Mey, and David Pietersz de Vries, vessels that were sailed to the site of the small fort (Fort Orange) and moored along the shore. They were, afloat, what the fort was meant to be in a beached version. Both were *handelsschepen*. The first were platforms of decking with gunnels over which men traded with natives, and the second, the fort or trading station, was an enclosed space with palisades over which trading was carried on as well.

We know that efforts to maintain the small fort met with difficulties and were sporadic in any case. The settlement of 1624 was, in fact, abandoned, and it was only in the late 1620s that the Company and men like the Amsterdam merchant Kiliaen van Rensselaer began to give the area their continual attention. Even then, the settlement was not a solidly founded community, certainly not like one of those that would characterize, for example, seventeenth-century New England. Being Dutch, it would not, under any circumstances, have been a place of binding written covenants, town fathers, and prescriptive political formulas. This settlement, however, lacked the basic elements of continuity in a notable way. It had no founding moment. Until 1652, it had no political, juridical, economic, or geographical center. Until that time – when it was given the name, Beverwijck – it had no single name, but was Fort Orange and Rensselaerswyck.

The settlers of 1624 and those who began to arrive in small numbers in the early 1630s either as soldiers and traders at the fort or as van

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Rensselaer's colonists were part of a process we now call the expansion of the Dutch overseas empire. They would have understood the proprieties of that extended but interconnected order. And they would have known their proper roles within it. One of those roles was to fulfill tasks worked out in the Low Countries, especially in Amsterdam. The land would be made into a Dutch landscape, not only out of their own decisions, but out of those made in Amsterdam as well.

It is tempting to argue that possession of Fort Orange and the surrounding land occurred out of the dialectic between Kiliaen van Rensselaer's interpretations of it and those of his colonists. But this would be to use a misleading model. Discovering what happened in the Hudson River valley between 1630 and 1650 is a matter of recognizing that van Rensselaer and the soldiers, traders, and colonists around Fort Orange shared cultural rules at one end of a space, as it were, and values at the other end. It was in the area of choices about how the two were best related and how they might be properly enacted that differences occurred. One promising way of approaching this task is, first, to recover the interpretations out of which van Rensselaer made decisions for Rensselaerswyck and, second, to measure the degree to which those decisions were in fact actualized.

Van Rensselaer never came to North America. Verbal reports and, more significantly, correspondence gave him possession of the *colonie* to which he first sent settlers in 1632. Words – in speech, and in inscribed accounts, letters, inventories, reports, and logs – were all his experience of New Netherland. They turned his ownership of Rensselaerswyck into its possession. They gave him the power to make decisions for the *colonie*, to possess it in images and plans, some of which were valuable and others useless. The meanings he put on Rensselaerswyck were often wrongheaded. Many were incongruent with a range of actualities in the valley after 1629. Nor were they the only meanings that gave shape to the *colonie*.

Nevertheless, van Rensselaer's meanings were decisive. Over fourteen years, he bent every effort to get adequate and precise knowledge of his patroonship. In the end, the effort frustrated, embittered, and defeated him. Yet he made and enforced decisions. In the process, the land became an artifact distinctively Dutch – and distinctively his.

Rensselaerswyck: Images and "Realities," 1630–1634

In 1643, Kiliaen van Rensselaer died. His direct influence upon the Hudson Valley had come to an end. Certainly by that time, Rensse-

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aerswyck was firmly possessed. Yet it was not the patroonship customarily described in history books as one that ran for twenty-three miles along the Hudson River and inland for about twenty-four miles on both sides. It was not the possession of a landed estate of about a million acres, as described in 1685. Rather, it was a place with the topography that the men and women of the 1630s and early 1640s chose to experience. It was the land that they – out of their own choices and those made by van Rensselaer and the Company – brought under interpretation. Some sense of the choices and resultant interpretations can be taken from reconstructing the geography they had made theirs by 1643.

Prologue

Every man and woman who came to Rensselaerswyck possessed it differently. Although the land itself limited interpretive possibilities and Dutch behavior on it was conventional, each settler took possession in a unique way. We cannot retrieve all of those experiences. However, by 1643, there were about two hundred men, women, and children in the colony, that is, about 20 percent of the settlers in New Netherland itself.[2] By that date, they had their bearings on the land.

Men explored in all directions. They may not have known Lake Champlain (Het Meer van Irocoisen) with any greater accuracy than contemporary European mapmakers – who generally placed it too far to the south and east or gave it outrageously large proportions, making it the source of all the great rivers that emptied into the Atlantic – but, by 1643, they knew it accurately enough for their purposes.[3] They were already using it like a rope that, taken hand over hand, led to Canada and trade. Dutch traders from Rensselaerswyck and Fort Orange also knew the Catskill area and the Connecticut River valley. They probably knew the Versch Rivier (Connecticut River) more fully than they cared to reveal, certainly in cartographic detail. They did not exploit the "old Boston road," that later linked Albany and Boston. Perhaps they had an exaggerated image of the distance. Joan Blaeu's 1635 map of northeastern North America and a copy of one executed in Pieter Minuit's time had, we know, doubled the distance from Albany to the Shawmut Peninsula.

2. John O. Evjen, *Scandinavian Immigrants in New York, 1630–1674* (Baltimore, 1972 reprint), 9. Oliver A. Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (Ithaca, 1986), 146, placed the colonists from 1630 to 1644 at 174.
3. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498–1909* (New York, 1915), 2:84; 72.

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Whatever the case, the colonists chose to reach Boston by navigating down the Hudson and along the coast.[4]

Most of all, the colonists had mastered the Hudson River, which linked the settlement to Manhattan Island and New Amsterdam. By 1633, skippers had given the Company's director in New Netherland a chart that provided accurate soundings up to Fort Orange. Later maps exaggerated the length of the river from New York City to Albany – and one that the British military were using in 1756 also skewed it absurdly to the east.[5] But the first generation of colonists had calibrated the river into fourteen reaches, named navigational sites, settled on islands, established landings, and estimated travel times. They had also demarcated the strands and water gates (*waterpoortjes*) in New Amsterdam that received cargo destined for Rensselaerswyck and Fort Orange.

The settlers had also come to know the land northwest of the settlement. Individuals remembered how they came to that knowledge. Symon Groot testified in 1688 that, exactly fifty years earlier "being a boy and . . . in ye Service of ye west India Company," he lived at the fort with Bastiaen Janse Krol. Krol then "had a great trade with ye Sinnekes & oy[r] Indians to ye westward" and ten years later, as Groot recalled it, he himself was "in ye Maquase Countrey."[6] The Mohawk River valley was the gateway to the fur trade. For a man like Groot, it was ownership enough to have access to native customers, to voyage into their country, and return. It was the trade route every settler soon knew and strove to master.

The immediate environment had also become Dutch by 1643. To catch this process we might think of the colonists as a troupe of medieval players deftly and inadvertently transforming the roof of a cart into the proper setting for action. Isaac Jogues, a French Jesuit who was in the settlement in 1644, saw the stage arranged in that year but was unimpressed. Farmers were scattered "2 or 3 leagues" along the river lands. Each was an "outliver" to his neighbor because he com-

4. See Stokes, *Iconography* 2, Plate 32, following 90, and Plate 39 following 120. In each, mensuration is the *Duitsche Mylen* rather than the English mile. I am calculating the geographical mile like Van Laer, that is, as 4.611 statute miles (see *VRBM*, 847); sending letters "by New England" was accepted procedure by 1635 (see KvR to Jacob Albertsz Planck, May 24, 1635, *VRBM*, 315. Kiliaen van Rensselaer (hereafter KvR).
5. Philip J. Schwarz, *The Jarring Interests: New York's Boundary Makers, 1664–1776* (Albany, 1979), 11; Lois Mulkearn, ed., *A Topographical Description of the Dominions of the United States of America: T[homas] Pownall* (New York, 1976) 8; See William A. Foote, "The American Independent Companies of the British Army, 1664–1764" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1966), 142, 143.
6. Deposition of Symon Groot, July 2, 1688, Lawrence H. Leder, ed., *The Livingston Indian Records, 1666–1723* (Gettysburg, 1956), 144.

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