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Peter Stuyvesant

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STUYVESANT, Peter (1610?–Feb. 1672), director general of New Netherland, was born Petrus Stuyvesant in Weststellingwerf, Netherlands, the son of Baltazar Johannes Stuyvesant, a minister of the Dutch Reformed church, and Margaretta Hardenstein. He was raised in the province of Friesland and completed the Latin School in Dokkum. In 1630 he began studies at the University of Franeker but did not receive a degree from that institution, probably being forced to leave as a disciplinary measure.

During the 1630s Stuyvesant worked as commissary and supercargo for the Dutch West India Company, serving in Fernando de Noronha, Pernambuco, and finally Curaçao, where he was promoted to director general in 1642. As commander of Curaçao and the adjacent islands, Stuyvesant led a number of offensives against Spanish possessions. In April 1644 he attacked the Spanish fort on St. Martin but lost his right leg when struck by a cannonball early in the siege. Stuyvesant quickly returned to Curaçao and was followed three weeks later by the Dutch troops after quitting their assault.

Stuyvesant's amputated leg did not heal properly in the tropics, and he departed for the Netherlands in August 1644. In his homeland he fully recovered from his wound and was fitted with a wooden leg. The following May Stuyvesant was approved by the Dutch West India Company to return to the Americas as director general of New Netherland, Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, and related islands, although in practice his time and attention would be focused on governing New Netherland. In August 1645 he married Judith Bayard. The following July, Stuyvesant was approved by the States General and took his oath of office. On Christmas Day he and his wife sailed for New Netherland, where they arrived on 11 May 1647. They had two sons, both born in the Dutch colony.

The New Netherland colonists, who had endured previous incompetent and self-serving leaders, heralded the arrival of Stuyvesant. However, his ostentatious appearance on the shores of Manhattan Island dismayed the people, who compared him to "a peacock,

with great state and pomp" (Kessler and Rachlis, p. 5). In a similar vein, he was later dubbed the "great Muscovy Duke" (Kessler and Rachlis, p. 110). Such descriptions derided his authoritarian nature, but this aspect of his personality enabled him to restore a colony that had suffered from mismanagement and American Indian attacks in the preceding years. Stuyvesant provided strong, stable leadership, reorganizing the director general's council and establishing an advisory board of nine leading citizens in addition to renewing and introducing several statutes to regulate the affairs of the colony. Stuyvesant's careful management of New Netherland paralleled a period of growth and stability in the colony. Still, his domineering nature did little to cultivate close relations with the settlers, and he initially incurred their disfavor when he deported two settlers who petitioned the council to review the previous director general's incompetent administration. These two were eventually exonerated by the company and returned to New Netherland, but such clashes between Stuyvesant and leading figures in the colony continued throughout his administration.

One of his most immediate tasks was to establish firm boundaries between New Netherland and New England and to calm tensions that had developed between the two regions in earlier years. Although the West India Company claimed territory from the Delaware River to the Connecticut River, English settlers had been moving west into those lands almost from the founding of New England, establishing outposts at New Haven and Hartford as well as settling on Long Island. Soon after his arrival in New Netherland Stuyvesant overtured Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts concerning boundary disputes between the Dutch and English colonies, but a number of clashes arose between New Haven and New Netherland in the following months that prevented Stuyvesant and the leaders of New England from meeting. The director general responded to the difficulties with conciliatory gestures and endeavored to avoid a direct confrontation. His efforts proved successful, and by 1650 relations with New England had become sufficiently calm that both sides could meet for a convention in Hartford, where they came to an agreement resolving their boundary dispute. While Stuyvesant gave up some lands long claimed by the West India Company, this accord successfully delineated the boundaries between the colonies and was respected by both sides until the end of Stuyvesant's administration.

The English were not the only ones to threaten New Netherland's boundaries. In 1637 Swedish traders, led by the former director general of New Netherland, Peter Minuit, had established an outpost on the Delaware River. In the 1640s and early 1650s the Swedes expanded their control over the Delaware region, including Dutch-occupied areas, effectively cutting off the Dutch from the fur trade there. In 1655 Stuyvesant prepared a military expedition and forced their capitulation. The former Swedish outposts then came under Dutch rule, while many Swedes remained in the colony.

The presence of non-Dutch settlers such as the Swedes was typical of New Netherland, especially within its principal settlement, New Amsterdam. The colony's polyglot character posed special problems for Stuyvesant, whose zealous support of the Dutch Reformed faith made it difficult for him to tolerate the cultural and religious diversity that emerged in New Netherland. Armed with the West India Company's provision that only public worship in the true reformed faith would be allowed in the colony and with the support and occasional prodding of the local Dutch Reformed clergy, Stuyvesant clashed in the 1650s with several religious and ethnic groups, including Lutherans, Quakers, and Jews. Because of the company's unwillingness to discourage trade by limiting freedom of religious expression, Stuyvesant, despite his single-mindedness, was forced to resolve most of these clashes through some sort of compromise that allowed the groups to remain and to continue practicing their particular faiths.

Threat of Indian attack, either by tribes or individuals, was a constant concern for the director general throughout his administration. To reduce conflict between the two sides, Stuyvesant prohibited the sale of alcohol and guns to the Indians, and he enacted legislation to protect the Indians from European molestation. While relations with the Mohawks and Mahicans around Fort Orange (now Albany) remained relatively peaceful because of the mutually beneficial fur trade, significant violence between the Dutch and Munsee-speaking groups, who lived along the mid to lower Hudson River, continued to occur. Learning from the mistakes of his predecessor, however, Stuyvesant sought to pacify the Indians whenever possible. On several occasions he ignored or downplayed Indian murders of individual Europeans or rumors of attacks, and he rarely allowed these to become excuses for violent Dutch retribution. In 1655, while Stuyvesant was in the Delaware attacking New Sweden, hundreds of Munsee-speaking Indians raided Manhattan Island and, after being attacked by the town's militia, crossed over to Staten Island, where they destroyed most of the farms and took more than a hundred captives. Stuyvesant prepared a counterattack but never initiated it. Rather, he recovered the hostages by negotiating with the Indians according to native diplomacy. When, in the late 1650s, hostilities erupted between Dutch settlers and the Esopus Indians, a band of Munsee-speakers living midway between Manhattan Island and Fort Orange, Stuyvesant pursued a cautious but more aggressive policy, forcing land cessions from the Indians and garrisoning the newly formed Dutch village in Esopus territory with several soldiers. When hostilities between the two sides continued, Stuyvesant responded militarily, finally forcing the Esopus to make peace in 1664. At the same time he maintained peaceful relations with the Indians near Fort Amsterdam and even enlisted their aid against the Esopus bands. He generally earned the respect of the Indians, who called him "the great sachem with the wooden leg."

Stuyvesant's final challenge came in August 1664, when an English fleet arrived in New Amsterdam's harbor demanding the surrender of the city and colony to the English. After stalling several days while he tried to muster public support and shore up the city's defenses, Stuyvesant finally capitulated. Although resistance was fruitless, his soldiers were ready and willing to fight. Yet the powder supplies would not have lasted a day, and Stuyvesant feared that, if the city were taken by force, it would quickly be looted by the English settlers waiting on Long Island. Although Stuyvesant had few alternatives, he was recalled to the fatherland to account for his actions. The West India Company did not find Stuyvesant's explanation satisfactory. Nevertheless, the States General chose not to pursue the company's accusations. Stuyvesant returned to New Netherland in 1668 and retired to his farm on Manhattan Island. He died there four years later.

Stuyvesant governed New Netherland for seventeen years, longer than any previous director general and longer than most of the English governors who followed. He ruled the colony during a time of transition in which the population shifted from itinerant or semi-permanent traders to permanent farmers and craftspeople. Under his stable leadership, the European population in New Netherland grew to about 9,000 by 1664. Although many criticized him as being too authoritarian, too dogmatic, and too zealous, he succeeded in the difficult task of balancing the West India Company's wishes against the needs of the settlement. Under his administration, New Netherland evolved from a struggling outpost of European settlement to an established transplanted European society.

- Most of the official correspondence and other papers relating to Stuyvesant's administration of Curaçao and New Netherland are in the New York State Archives, Albany. Much of this material has been translated and published in the *New Netherland Documents Series* (formerly *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch*), trans. and ed. Charles Gehring. Published volumes include 1–4 (1974); 5 (1983); 6 (1995); 16, part 1 (1991); 16, part 2 (1990); 17 (1987); 18–19 (1981); and GG, HH, and II (1980). The introductions to many of these works include discussions of various aspects of Stuyvesant's administration as well as information regarding other primary sources related to Stuyvesant and the history of New Netherland. Other records remain in the Dutch National Archives, the Hague. These were copied and translated in the nineteenth century and can be found in Edmund B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York*, vols. 1 and 2 (1856, 1858). The most recent American book on Stuyvesant is Henry H. Kessler and Eugene Rachlis, *Peter Stuyvesant and His New York* (1959), written for a popular audience and focusing on the history of New Amsterdam as well as Stuyvesant. Oliver Rink, *Holland on the Hudson: An Economic and Social History of Dutch New York* (1986), also offers some insight into Stuyvesant's administration.

PAUL OTTO