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HUDSON-FULTON CELEBRATION

# Historical Explanation of the Dutch Floats

IN THE ALL-NATIONS' DIVISION OF THE HUDSON-FULTON PARADE

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ALBANY, N. Y.

OCTOBER 8, 1909

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ISSUED BY  
THE HOLLAND HUDSON-FULTON SOCIETY  
OF  
ALBANY AND VICINITY



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## Historical Explanation of the Dutch Floats.

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**I**N response to the city's invitation to take part in the All-Nations' parade, on the occasion of the Hudson-Fulton celebration, the Hollanders of Albany and vicinity have prepared three floats which, it is believed, will at once be of local historic interest and suggestive of the influence of Dutch settlement on the development of the entire Hudson valley.

The subjects of the floats are the first Court of Fort Orange and the village of Beverwyck, the first stone building of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in the city of Albany, and the first school in the colony of Rensselaerswyck, established respectively in 1652, 1715 and 1648. They are intended to represent in concrete form, and for distinct periods in the history of the locality, the three principal elements of civilization, Justice, Religion and Education, which were introduced in this region by a nation which at all times has been conspicuous for its love of law and liberty, its belief in religious toleration and its high degree of general culture. The order of the floats is that of the establishment of the first judicial, religious and educational institutions in this locality, of which one existed side by side with the court represented by the first float, another laid the foundation for the organization represented by the second float and the last itself has been chosen as the subject of the third float.

To make this clear it is necessary to recall that the city of Albany owes its origin to the establishment of a large agricultural colony, known as the patroonship of Rensselaerswyck, which, in accordance with certain privileges granted in 1629 by the Dutch West India Company, was founded in 1630 by a few directors of the Company, of whom Kiliaen van Rensselaer had the management of the colony's affairs and was designated as patroon. This colony extended at first mainly along the west side of the Hudson river, from Coeymans to the mouth of the Mohawk, but by subsequent purchases from the Indians it was enlarged on the east side of the river, so as to cover ultimately a tract of  $22\frac{1}{2}$  by 48 miles, containing nearly 700,000 acres. Near the center of this tract stood the Company's trading post, called Fort Orange, which was built in 1624 on the site of the present steamboat square, and around this fort clustered the principal settlement of the colony, which in the beginning was designated as the Fuyck, or hoop-net, from the converging lines of its streets, and later became known as the village of Beverwyck, the nucleus of our present city.

The administration of the fort and that of the colony were entirely distinct. While the first was in charge of a factor, called *commis*, and occupied by a few soldiers and traders in the service of the West India Company, the second was ruled by the agents of the patroon and settled entirely by the latter's tenants. As early as 1634, and perhaps even as 1632, this colony had a court, composed after the manner of the manorial courts of the fatherland at that time, of a *schout* and from three to seven *schepens*, who demanded and rendered judgment in the name of the patroon. In 1642 the colony received a minister

of the Gospel, by the name of Johannes Megapolensis, and in 1648 the court of the colony granted permission to Evert Nolden to teach school.

All these persons, agents, magistrates, pastor and schoolmaster, were appointed either directly or indirectly by the patroon; in the administration of the affairs of the colony the inhabitants had no share.

In 1652 there came a change. Owing to the closeness with which the houses of the colony surrounded the fort, disputes arose at an early day regarding the limits of the Company's jurisdiction. These led in 1648 to a prolonged controversy between Director General Peter Stuyvesant and the newly appointed director of Rensselaerwyck, Brant Arentsz van Slichtenhorst, and ended in 1652 in a highhanded measure on the part of the Director General, by which he took the principal settlement out of the jurisdiction of the colony and erected it into a separate village by the name of Beverwyck. At the request of the inhabitants, Director General Stuyvesant, by decree of April 10, 1652, established in this village a *Kleine Banck van Justitie*, a subordinate bench of justice, which began its sessions on April 15, 1652. This court sat in the dual capacity of a council for the administration of public affairs and of a court of justice for Fort Orange and the village of Beverwyck. It was composed of the *commis*, or trading agent and chief military officer of the fort, and six *commis-sarissen*, or magistrates, of whom three, two ordinary and one extra-ordinary magistrates, were appointed each year by the Director General and Council of New Netherland from a double number chosen by the inhabitants of the village. The first persons who composed the

court were Johannes Dyckman, *commis*, and Abraham Staets, Volckert Jansz Douw, Cornelis Theunisz van Westbroeck, Rutger Jacobsz, Jean Labatie and Andries Herpertsz, *commis-sarissen*, while Pieter Ryverdingh acted as court messenger and clerk.

This court or council of the village of Beverwyck may be considered the germ of the municipal government of the city of Albany to-day, and has therefore been chosen as the subject of the first float.

The court of Beverwyck held its sessions in the Company's building in the fort, almost immediately adjoining the house occupied by the court of the colony of Rensselaerswyck, which continued to exist till the arrival of the first English governor, Richard Nicolls, in 1665, when the two courts were consolidated.

No drawing of the first court house of the village of Beverwyck is in existence, but a description has happily been preserved in a memorandum submitted by the Company's *commis*, Johannes La Montagne, on September 4, 1660, in justification of the expenditures incurred by him in building the second court house of Fort Orange and Beverwyck in 1657 and 1658. This description is as follows:

"The old house was 26 feet and 9 inches Rhine-land measure in length, and two stories high, built all around of one inch boards and having a pavilion shaped roof, covered with old shingles, as said before. Underneath was a cellar, 19 feet in width and as long as the width of the house. The first story had eight beams, resting on corbels, and was divided into two parts by a pine partition; at the north end was a room 16 or 17 feet in width and at the south end a vestibule of 10 feet in width. The second story consisted

of a single room, used by the court, without ceiling or chimney, and to get to this room one had to climb a straight flight of stairs through a trap door."

This building had by 1657 sagged at the north end in such a way as almost completely to crush the house of Lambert van Valckenburgh and its general condition was so dilapidated that repairs seemed useless. It was therefore torn down to make room for a larger brick building, which in the above mentioned memorandum is described as follows:

"A brick building was built, with two cellars, each 21 feet square, separated by a two brick wall. The foundation wall of the said cellar is 3 or 4 feet in thickness, built of substantial stone (hauled a distance of 16 miles) 6 feet high, to the level of the ground, and on top of this is a brick wall, two feet high and three bricks thick, upon which rest the cellar beams. The first story is divided into three parts; at the north end is a room 21 feet square, inside measure, with a brick chimney; at the south end a kitchen 16 feet in width and 21 feet in length, also with a chimney and provided with a bedstead and cupboard of wainscot; and in the middle a hallway 5 feet in width, separated from the large room by a one brick wall. The upper story is divided by a half brick wall into two equal parts, each 21 feet square. At the north end is a room destined for the court; at the other end an office, in which are a wainscoted bedstead and a chimney. Access to this floor is by a winding staircase and a separate landing. This landing has three doors; one on the left side, which gives access to the court room; another towards the front, which gives access to the office and which is faced by an oval window in the west wall; and a third door

on the right hand, through which access is had to the attic, by means of a winding staircase. This attic extends all over the house and above it is a loft, suitable for the storage of powder and other ammunition. In short, it is a strong and substantial house, the walls below and above (upon which the beams rest without uprights) being one and a half bricks in thickness, provided at each gable end with a double chimney, braced by 42 anchors and built of choice clinker brick. The house is covered with well baked tiles, and according to everyone's opinion makes a strong, commodious and handsome structure."

As to the church, we have seen that the colony of Rensselaerswyck had a minister of the Gospel as early as 1642, Domine Megapolensis having arrived with his family on August 13th of that year. As far as can be ascertained from the records, contrary to the usual statements found in printed histories, this minister at once took up his abode on the east side of the Hudson river, in what was then termed the *Grenenbosch*, literally pine wood, later corrupted to Greenbush, in the present city of Rensselaer. For some years he seems to have preached either in his own house or in the patroon's warehouse on the west side of the river, near the fort, which warehouse was between 1646 and 1648 adapted for religious purposes by building therein a pulpit, a sounding board, a pew for the magistrates, another pew for the deacons, a rail around the pulpit, a corner seat and nine benches for the congregation. This building was used by Domine Megapolensis till the end of his service in the colony in 1649, and no doubt was also used by Domine Wilhelmus Grasmeer, who preached in the colony in 1650 and 1651, and by Domine Gideon Schaets, who was engaged in Holland as





A VIEW OF THE LATE PROTESTANT DUTCH CHURCH in the CITY of ALBANY

pastor of the colony of Rensselaerswyck on May 8, 1652, less than a month after the village of Beverwyck had become an independent settlement. Domine Schaets continued to be paid by the patroon and the co-directors of the colony till July 24, 1657, but owing to the altered conditions, and the removal of the buildings around the fort, ordered by Stuyvesant, steps were taken by the inhabitants as early as 1655 to erect a building of their own. The result was the first church building of the village of Beverwyck, erected in 1656 at the juncture of State street and Broadway, then called Jonker straet and Handelaer straet. No picture of this building exists, but from references in letters of the period, in which the church is called a *Blockhuys Kercke*, it appears to have been a wooden structure in the shape of a blockhouse. In the course of 1657 it was adorned with a small bell sent over by the directors of the chamber of Amsterdam of the West India Company and shortly after it was provided with a handsome pulpit, made in Holland, which is still preserved in the First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of this city. In 1715, during the ministry of Domine Petrus Henricus van Driessen, the original building was torn down to make room for a larger stone structure, which is represented by the illustration on the opposite page and which forms the subject of the second float.

This building was erected around the walls of the old building and roofed over before the former structure was taken down, so that the customary services were interrupted but three Sabbaths. On the 30th of October the first services were held in the new building and on the 13th of November the building was consecrated. It served the congregation for reli-

gious purposes for nearly a century, but in 1806 gave, like so many other venerable buildings, way for the march of improvements and was demolished, the materials being used in the construction of a new church on Beaver street.

Regarding the first school in the colony of Rensselaerswyck, which forms the subject of the third float, very little is known. On April 30, 1648, the court of the colony granted permission to Evert Nolden to teach school. Whether he taught on the west side of the river, in what is now Albany, or on the east side of the river, in Greenbush, in a building which Arent van Curler intended to put up in 1643, and which he thought might later be used for school purposes, is not known, but certain it is that he did not teach very long. In 1650, the inhabitants of the colony of Rensselaerswyck petitioned the court to appoint a competent schoolmaster and on September 9, 1650, the court, in answer to this petition, appointed Arent van Curler and Goossen Gerritsz van Schaick trustees of a fund to be raised for the building of a school. No record of the appointment of a schoolmaster is found, but on November 23, 1651, the court of the colony granted Adriaen Jansz, schoolmaster, 50 guilders towards the payment of his house rent. Taking this fact in connection with the wording of the license granted in 1665 by Governor Richard Nicolls, to John Shutte, the first English schoolmaster of Albany, it is likely that Adriaen Jansz taught school in his own home, giving free instruction to the children of the poor and charging such fees for the instruction of others as the parents could afford to pay.

A. J. F. VAN LAER







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