



CHARLES GEHRING, New Netherland Project director and translator, with a Dutch manuscript at the State Museum in Albany.

CINDY SCHULTZ/TIMES UNION

Documentary aims to reclaim history and importance of New Netherland



Lost world

REVISITED

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In the 1650s, Manhattan Island was a bustling, polyglot place, the center of a Dutch colony that stretched from a settlement in what would become Albany, across to Cape Cod and south to Delaware Bay. Less than half the population was Dutch; the remainder, Germans and Poles, Croats and Norwegians, members of varied Indian tribes and Africans both free and enslaved.

"The multiethnic society we have today originated in New Netherland," says Charles Gehring, a linguist, historian and specialist in the old Dutch language, who has devoted 35 years to researching that colony, called New Netherland.

He's spent many of those years trying to correct misimpressions of the Dutch of New Netherland, which lasted from 1609, when Henry Hudson first sailed up the river that later would bear his name, to 1664, when British warships forced the surrender of Fort Amsterdam, at the southern end of Manhattan.

Speaking of the English, Gehring says, "To the victor go the textbooks." In other words, the story of the Dutch in the Northeastern United States has largely been told through the prism of the British, and so the important contributions and advances of the Dutch period are diminished, leaving the popular understanding with just a few facts that many remember from New York state and American history.

Between history books and the fictions of Washington Irving, the image of the Dutch is of a "fat burgher sitting (and) smoking a clay pipe and watching the world go by," as Gehring says in a new documentary. Mentioning a few standout names from New Netherland history, he characterizes how the period has long been shortchanged by compression and

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THE FIRST
permanent Dutch settlement was based in the present day Albany.

Local history

"UNCOVERING AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN COLONY: THE NEW NETHERLAND PROJECT"

■ **What:** Documentary about Dutch history of New York

■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. Saturday

■ **Where:** WNYT Ch. 13

■ **Info:** The New Netherland Project, <http://www.nnp.org>

■ **Note:** The documentary is also available for sale, at \$19.95, at <http://For-PeopleWhoThink.com>. Fifty percent of the proceeds will go to support future work of the New Netherland Project.