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**Norwegian History Begins in New Amsterdam**

This is a big year for Norwegian-Americans, as it is the 200th Anniversary of the sloop *Restauration*, landing in New York (1825) marking the beginning of the great organized emigration from Norway to America. In fact, it is so important that a replica of the *Restauration* is taking the original voyage from Stavanger, Norway to New York and is set to arrive here (New York Harbor) in early October. - And this is very exciting. I intend to visit the sloop and celebrate its arrival.

However, as the Founder and President of the Scandinavian East Coast Museum, as well as a Norwegian-American Brooklynite, I take some umbrage or at least, raise an eyebrow with this date’s identity. Why? Because Norwegians have been at war, the New York area since it was known as New Netherlands, which negates 200 years of history.

**Background** - Norway was under Danish rule for approximately 400 years. In 1814, Norway was then taken as a spoil of war from Denmark, after its defeat in the Napoleonic Wars, and given to Sweden. Norway was granted a Constitution, but did not receive their independence until 1905. This left Norway subservient for about 500 years.

There were less educational and employment opportunities. It was largely dependent on farming and fishing. The latter was difficult, due to the rocky soil. Also, people had very large families (12 - 13 children was not unusual) and only the oldest son could inherit the land. This policy had good intentions, ensuring that plots were large enough to sustain a family, but did little for the rest of the clan who had to fend in other ways. However, Norwegians were proficient, exceptional in constructing and sailing ships. Here they excelled so much that in later years, this very small country under the thumb of Denmark and later Sweden dominated on the seas, fluctuating between the 3rd and 4th largest shipping nation in the world.

Shipping/sailing however, was usually an opportunity mostly open to men and of course not all of the population could be absorbed into this industry. Another option was to emigrate and Holland became a beacon, much as the U.S. did in the 20th century. It was a logical destination, close by, similar in culture and affluent, especially during its Golden Age around 1575 - 1675.

And many Norwegians did emigrate to Holland during the Dutch Golden Age. And enough Norwegians emigrated to Holland to inspire a Symposium 400 years later in Amsterdam. The focus was the relationship between Holland and Norway during the Dutch Golden Age, which focused on the 1600s and 1700s. I had the opportunity to attend.

A few things that stood out to me, is that during the Dutch Golden Age, trade through shipping was at its core. However, Holland did not have essential resources needed - large trees for timber to make large ships and granite for their harbors, as well as shipbuilders and sailors. However, these were abundant in southern Norway. These Norwegian resources were used to build their impressive fleet and harbors and of course they also used the manpower from Norway to build and sail those ships. One quote that stuck with me from that symposium is, *"If you turn over the harbor of Amsterdam you will find a Norwegian forest.”* A similar quote popular in 17th century Holland at that time is “Amsterdam is standing on Norway.”

**New Netherlands and New Amsterdam** The Dutch founded the colony of New Netherlands in 1614, (on some of the land that later became New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Delaware). Many of those who joined were Norwegian or Norwegian background. It was short lived, as the British took control in 1664, but it had a huge impact and gave a great opportunity to the Norwegians who had emigrated under the Dutch. I’d like to share some notable Norwegians in the New Amsterdam (New York) colony.

**The Bergen Family** Hans Hansen Bergen had originally been a shipwright and came to the colony in 1633, running a tobacco plantation in Manhattan. He was the first Norwegian to get a patent from the Dutch for a farm in Brooklyn, in 1664. It was located in the Wallabout Bay (later the site of the Brooklyn Navy Yard.) His family became very prominent and married into other well-known families, including the Vanderbilts, the Voorhees, the Wyckoffs, the Cortelyous, the Denyses, the Suydams, the Vanderveers and the Bensons. One of his descendants was the first alderman in our area, when Yellow Hook’s name was changed to Bay Ridge.

**Dirk the Norseman** The first recorded European settler of what is now Greenpoint was Dirk Volckertsen , a Norwegian immigrant who in 1645 built a 1 + 1⁄2-story farmhouse there with the help of two Dutch carpenters.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenpoint,_Brooklyn#cite_note-fulkerson.org-12) There he planted orchards and raised crops, sheep and cattle. He was called Dirck de Noorman by the Dutch colonists of the region, *Noorman* being the Dutch word for "Norseman" or "Northman".[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenpoint,_Brooklyn#cite_note-13) Wikipedia

**Trijn Jonas -** Females had a lot of power under the Dutch. They could inherit property and female professionals were respected. Trijn Jonas, a Norwegian was approached by the Dutch West India Company to emigrate to New Amsterdam and serve as a midwife for the burgeoning colony. They incentivized her decision by offering to provide her with a home. She agreed and emigrated to New Amsterdam with two young daughters (this was after the death of her husband). She arrived in 1630 and is thought to be the first midwife in New Amsterdam. Her daughter and granddaughter also have interesting stories, which I will be sharing in presentations in the fall of this year.

**Contributions to New Amsterdam/New York**

New York harbor would not have grown without Norway’s natural resources, especially their man power. Besides New York’s shipping dominance another thing they contributed to was the construction trades in both ship building and architecture. This includes bringing clapboard architecture to the New World, which spread and became and remains ubiquitous throughout our country. Also, their cultural beliefs of caring for others, i.e. the social contract is core to their lives. Perhaps even adopted from the Dutch. In Brooklyn alone there was a Norwegian Hospital (later Lutheran Medical Center now NYU) 4 Scandinavian Homes for the elderly, 2 homes for children whose families needed support, 2 Scandinavian Engineers Societies, the Carpenter's Hall, etc…

So while I am excited about the recreation of the sloop *Restauration’s* voyage of 1825, it should not erase the 200 years of Norwegian history that pre-dated it in New York and our surrounding areas of the East Coast.

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Scandinavian East Coast Museum

Civic Co-chair, 17th of May Parade Brooklyn

For more info you can reach us on Facebook or at scandinavianmuseumbrooklyn1@gmail or 347 - 860 - 1932. **This display will be up until May 31, 2024**