

STALCOP NOTES



Aug, 2013

THE MAN THAT STARTED IT ALL

LSS

These are brief, condensed notes. More information is available.

Peter Minuit was a Walloon whose protestant parents moved from Doornik, Henegouwen in the southern Netherlands, which then included present-day Belgium, to Wesel in Germany, in order to escape the Catholic Church. Minuit's birth year is not exactly known but was before 1589. Peter Minuit married Gertrude Raedts on August 20, 1613. Gertrude came from a wealthy family. That probably helped Peter in establishing himself. In a legal document, a will, drawn up in the Dutch City of Utrecht in 1615, he is described as a diamond cutter.

Peter Minuit joined the Dutch West India Company, probably in the early 1620's, and was sent to New Netherland in 1625 to search for tradable goods in addition to the animal pelts which were the major product coming from New Netherland at that time. The next year, 1626, he was appointed by the Dutch West India Company to become the new Governor General of New Netherland, taking over from Willem Verhulst. Minuit was out searching for new products when he was made Governor-General. He arrived back in New Amsterdam on May 4, 1626.

Although Peter Minuit was Governor General of the colony for five years he is best known for his purchase of Manhattan Island from the Indians for 60 guilders. The price was estimated to be about \$24 in 1926 dollars, probably equivalent to about \$6 to 7 hundred dollars today. The purchase was made either in May or July 1626.

Peter Minuit's tenure as Governor General was uneventful compared with other governor-generals of the Dutch colony. Upon his arrival in 1626, he proposed a plan to establish an advisory body to the governor general. It would be a council of five members which would advise the governor general and would jointly with the governor general develop, administer and adjudicate a body of laws to help govern the colony. In addition he proposed the institution of what today would be call an attorney general to enforce the laws.

Relative peace existed in the colony during Minuit's tenure both among the population of New Amsterdam and with the Native Americans who then still lived in close proximity to and among the new settlers. This was not to last after he was replaced. In 1631 or 1632 Minuit was relieved of his duties as governor general. What the reasons were for his termination is not clear but the directors of the Dutch West India Company were profit oriented business people and Minuit may have made decisions that were, in their view, not profitable to the Dutch West India Company organization.

After his governor generalship of New Netherland ended Minuit applied to the Swedish Government to establish a settlement in the South River, now the Delaware. It was in territory claimed by both the Dutch and English.

Peter Minuit's instructions were interesting, to say the least. According to his SECRET orders he was instructed to sail through the English Channel to the latitude of 44 degrees. From there he was to turn west and sail across the Atlantic Ocean to Sable Island, if possible. This route across the Atlantic would have been very difficult if it were possible at all. It was against the wind and the current the entire distance. If he reached Sable Island he was ordered to take soundings all around the island and make maps and sketches showing all rivers, harbors and roads (ship anchorages). Sable Island is classed as a sand bar. It is crescent shaped, 26 miles long and less than a mile wide and very low. There is no record of the course the ships actually followed or if they even made it to Sable Island.

A second instruction named Jan Hindrickson van der Water as skipper of the Kalmar Nyckel and Michel Symonssen as First Mate. Both were Dutch and rumor had it neither liked Minuit. The instruction went to to say that if any mishap befell Peter Minuit making it impossible for him to continue with his duties them Symonssen was to take his place. This instruction appears to contain the seeds of what might have happened to Peter Minuit.

It was reported by the officers of the Kalmar Nyckel that during the departure from New Sweden in 1638 Minuit ordered the ship south to the Caribbean to trade for a load of tobacco because there was no tobacco available in the Virginia Colony. Their story goes that after arriving in the Caribbean Minuit was having dinner aboard a nearby Dutch ship when a hurricane suddenly struck and forced all ships out to sea. The officers reported that Minuit was never seen again however the Kalmar Nyckel, under Michel Symonssen, made it back to the Netherlands and then on to Sweden without him. The ship was apparently undamaged by the hurricane and the cargo was intact.

The story the ship's officers told about what happened to Peter Minuit is very unlikely.

First. Tobacco was available in large quantities in Virginia, but not in the Caribbean. The trade goods supplied to Minuit by the voyage backers are reported to have been French wines and dress shoes. Such a cargo was not suitable for trade to the Native Americans. The ship's crew claimed there was no tobacco to be purchased in Virginia. More likely Virginia traders would not buy the cargo because it could not be traded to the Native Americans.

Second. The trip from the South River to the Caribbean is long and a very, very slow, hard trip if it were possible at all. The ship would be sailing the entire distance against both the prevailing summer winds and the strong northbound current of the Gulf Stream. It was a nearly impossible voyage for an unpowered sailing ship that had a very low hull speed and could not sail very close to the direction of the wind. Peter Minuit would have known this especially since he had been ordered to try to cross the Atlantic Ocean to Sable Island under the same conditions.

Third. The National Hurricane Center of the U S National Weather Service has conducted an enormous amount of research documenting the tracks of historic hurricanes by examining ship's logbooks in archives all over the world. There is no record of any hurricane that forced a number of ships out to sea to match the story told by the officers of the Kalmar Nyckel recorded in those ships log books.

Forth. Hurricanes have high wind speeds inside of them but low forward speeds. The build up to hurricane force winds normally takes place over a period of several days. The officers of the Kalmar Nyckel would have us believe that a hurricane snuck up and quickly struck full force upon an entire harbor of ships all while Peter Minuit was having dinner. Further, that it blew all ships out of the harbor and none went aground. That is simply not creditable.

Fifth. It seems likely that the story told by the ship's officers upon their return to the Netherlands is a cover-up. It seems much more likely that they deliberately sailed away, leaving Peter Minuit stranded ashore probably in the Virginia Colony and not in the Caribbean, They concocted the hurricane story to cover-up their crime. In that time period no one knew very much about hurricanes.

Sixth. Rev. Israel Acrelius says in his history that Minuit made his way back to Fort Christina and died there in July 1639. Acrelius goes on to state that when Rev Eric Björk arrived in 1697 Peter Minuit's grave was pointed out to him.

See *A History of New Sweden*, Rev Israel Acrelius, Published 1874, page 28.

