

# Dutch Treat

by

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According to A.E. Smith's<sup>1</sup> pungent description, the Colonial World "was a haven for the godly", "a refuge for the oppressed", "a challenge to the adventurous, and "the last resort of scoundrels."<sup>1</sup> We ask the question, "Why did the Dutch come to the New World?" First there had to be a confluence of events to even make their coming possible.

During the Eighty Years War between 1568 and 1648, of the Dutch fight for independence from Spain, the city of Leiden was besieged twice by the Spanish, in 1573 and 1574. Rather than surrender and be killed, half its citizens chose to starve to death. William of Orange and his sailors broke the dykes and used 200 flat-bottomed boats pushed by a strong west wind to provide the survivors "white bread and herring." Simultaneously the Spanish fled, never to return. Ever since then, the Dutch annually celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1574, the date of their relief.

In 1581 the Dutch States wrote their "*Act of Abjuration*" and threw off the restraining shackles of subservience to King Philip II of Spain. The exact wording stated that: "A prince is constituted by God to...shepherd his sheep...When he does not...he is but a tyrant."

What followed was the beginning of the Netherlands as a nation, and the Dutch entered their "Golden Period." In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch became very rich trading with the Far East. Though the Dutch achieved such dominance on the seas that allowed their ships to sail almost anywhere in the world, the trips were long and hazardous for both ships and their crews.

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<sup>1</sup> A.E. Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America, 1606-1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947), p.5

Each trip to the Orient necessitated sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. A shorter route to the East was needed. The Dutch had the most accurate charts available, but one chart fancifully showed a direct pathway to Asia through the north pole, with the ice having melted in the summer sun.

Henry Hudson had two failed voyages for the English, each encountering impassible ice north of Russia. The English would not finance a third exploration voyage. Hudson then hired himself out to sail for the Dutch East India Company in a ship called *de Halve Maen* (The Half Moon). He left the Netherlands in April, 1609, having been told, "Take the Northeast Passage, but if you meet ice again, simply return immediately to Amsterdam." After again being blocked by ice, Hudson disobeyed his employer's explicit orders and sailed west instead.

As he sailed southwest down the continental coast, Hudson eventually came to a large well-protected harbor with fresh water flowing into it. He thought he had found a way to the Orient. But as Hudson sailed 150 miles north up this passage, he found it ever shallower and narrower. It was simply a river, not a way to the Far East! But Hudson claimed the area for the Dutch by right of first discovery. The Dutch were to later label this the "North River", though it is now known to us as the Hudson River.

In 1610 Hudson sailed again for the English, but he was not a firm leader. He only got as far as a large bay inside Canada, where they had to winter. The next spring his crew mutinied, forcing Hudson into a small boat. He was never seen again. The name, Hudson's Bay, commemorates his sailing exploration and sad ending.

The Dutch soon returned to the harbor and waterway Hudson had found in 1609 and named it the North River and began trading with the Indians for beaver furs in return for implements and tools. This was ten

years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. The furs taken to Holland would be turned into beaver hats. This was a time of a mini-ice age in Europe, and furs were in great demand, with Russia becoming a huge market for the Dutch.

In 1601, the Dutch formed the Dutch East India Company and for the next half-century cornered the Far East trading market for spices from islands in current day Indonesia. A twelve-year truce with Spain began in 1609, and trading blossomed in both the Far East and the Western Atlantic areas.

In 1621, when hostilities broke out again with Spain, the Dutch almost immediately formed the Dutch West Indies Company. This second chartered company gathered several ventures together and prevented fur traders from several Dutch homeland cities bidding against one another with the Indians.

It must be emphasized that the overriding purpose of both the East and West Dutch Trading Companies was not to colonize but to make profits for the Nineteen Lords Herren who had each heavily invested thousands of guilders. Individually and collectively they played the role of today's venture capitalists. The two main ways to obtain the greatest profit were privateering and trade.

To their credit, the Dutch West Indies Company did instruct merchant traders to give the Indians a fair price. Oral history handed down to currently living descendants of the Mohawk Indians bears out that the Indians liked to trade with the Dutch, more than trading with either the French or the English. These Indian descendants say, "The Dutch treated us well."

In contrast, the French traders were usually accompanied by priests. In addition to trading goods, the French had a second major goal, that of

Jesuit priests converting the Indians to the Catholic faith. Today's Mohawk descendants say that this proselytizing destroyed their own spirituality. Their current sachem or chief also recounts that the English had a primary goal of conquering the Indian tribes by military force. It is perhaps not surprising that the Indians did not like to trade with either the French or the English.

For the Dutch had neither goal, the Indians' religious conversion nor their domination by military force. The Dutch were more mercantile in their motivation. They simply wanted to become rich.

The Nineteen Lords Herren in Amsterdam had little interest in encouraging large numbers of colonists and wanted to keep their numbers down to the level necessary to support trade. Both East and West Indies Companies were private ventures for profit and neither were directly underwritten nor controlled by the Dutch government. Some soldiers might be necessary, but every guilder for their support was a guilder less of profit!

Forts gave some protection to the traders against attack, from either domestic or foreign threat. One early Dutch trading post was Fort Orange, at a site near present day Albany. Formation of the Dutch West Indies Company in 1621 led to the thirteen competing traders based at Fort Orange being simply absorbed into that company.

By 1625 Fort Amsterdam had been built on the southern tip of Manhattan Island to protect the settlement there. The new village next to the fort was called *New Amsterdam*. Portions of five current states, collectively became known as New Netherland, namely: parts of the future states of New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

The Dutch West Indies Company directors had insisted that the Island of the Manhattan Indians be purchased for a fair amount and that title to the land be properly secured. The Dutch West Indies agent, Pieter Minuit, in 1626 “bought” the entire island from the Indians for sixty guilders’ worth of metal tools and other merchandise.

On November 7, 1626 a ship named *Arms of Amsterdam*, was carrying more than 8,000 furs from New Amsterdam when it arrived in its home port. It also carried Minuit’s letter from New Amsterdam that reported his purchase of the Island of Manhattan. Peter Schaghen, a representative of the States-General, read the letter the next day to the Lords Herren, the Assembly of the Nineteen, of the Dutch West India Company. Thereafter it became known as the “*Schaghen Letter*.” The letter described the Island of the Manhattan Indians was 11,000 *morgen* (or 22,000 acres) in size and that it now belonged to the Dutch. A century ago this sum of sixty guilders was wrongly valued as equivalent to just twenty-four dollars. But a more accurate calculation, would translate the goods value to the furs exchanged for, and carried on the boat, would make the purchase price equivalent to \$46,000.

However, It is evident now to us that the Indian hunters and fishermen lacked the European concept of land ownership. To the Indians, it meant a “sharing of the land” and a joint defensive pact. The Indian and the Dutch views of the transaction were quite different, as evidenced by the fact that the Indians did not fully leave Manhattan until 1680, some 54 years after the date of “purchase.” In that year the Manhattan Indians fully moved north over the Harlem River into what is now the Bronx.

The first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was truly the “golden age” for the Dutch. For a country with a population of only two million people, they had developed the world’s greatest naval power of that day. They were

seemingly able to sail anywhere around the world, and they established supply or trading posts in West Africa, Brazil, Dutch Guinea, and the Caribbean. In the Far East they did the same in Indonesia, as well as Japan. The richest of the Spice Islands was *Pulau Run*, noted for its prized nutmeg. But piracy of Portuguese and Spanish ships, loaded with gold and other goods, along South America's eastern shore, as well as in the Antilles Islands, in the first half of the 1600's produced more wealth for the Dutch than importation of furs from North America.

The Cape of Good Hope on the southern tip of Africa was established as a resupply station for ships on the way to and from the far East. English seafaring interests clashed with those of the Dutch. In a series of naval engagements, the Dutch won more sea battles than the English did, marooning the latter's trading posts. Ultimately, the English East Indian Society was driven into bankruptcy.

The trading pattern that developed over these decades was to establish *factors*, or traders and their storehouses. The traders were stationed there permanently, for example, in cities on the coast of India and islands of Indonesia. The traders were there to barter and trade for precious spices. Heavily fortified ships would sail to the traders to pick up goods and leave items useful for additional bartering with indigenous people.

Investors at home in Holland had to be patient, for trading with the Far East could take a voyage of two-years, or even longer, for a boat to make the full round trip. Ships faced multiple dangers, including piracy, capture, or shipwreck in treacherous storms. And if a boat sank the entire investment would be lost. Therefore, it was prudent to invest in several ships, through purchase of just a portion of each ship and its expedition's cost, by buying one or more "*stocks*". Many people today may not realize that the word, and concept of "*stock*", now in daily use world-wide in financial markets, came from the Dutch language.

Proportionate investment was a way to share the risk among a number of investors.

However, if your fully laden Dutch East Indies Company ship did make it back to Amsterdam fully loaded with spices, the investors would be rich.

Trade with the Spice Islands created a need for nearly continuous war with the English and other European naval powers. The prosperity of the Dutch “Golden Age” was due to the Dutch gradually winning more of those sea and trade battles with the English, Spanish, and Portuguese. There were a total of four Anglo-Dutch Naval Wars, but wars are not unending. At some point in history, hostilities must cease and terms of peace be agreed upon.

Huig de Groot (Hugo Grotius), the Dutch father of international and maritime law, set rules for fairness in settlement of disputes between nations. We will later see how these same rules for settlement would be applied to New Amsterdam.

Peter Minuit’s successor was Director William Kieft, who demanded Indians to pay “protection money” in furs and wampum. They rebelled, and it escalated into a vicious war against these Indians in 1640. Kieft massacred many in the middle of the night as they lay asleep near New Amsterdam’s wooden palisaded northern wall, the area known today as “Wall Street”. Indian retaliatory raids on Staten Island Dutch farmers necessitated their moving away. This Dutch-American Indian war was disruptive to New Netherland’s development.

The conflict was called Kieft’s War. The Dutch West Indies Company replaced him in 1647 with Director-General Peter Stuyvesant, a tall Frisian Dutch soldier who had served in the East and West Indies. A son of a Calvinist clergyman, his distinguishing physical aspect was his

wooden leg. He had lost his right leg due to a failed military adventure on the Spanish held Caribbean island of St. Martin. He showed a stern countenance and carriage for those he considered to be dissolute beer drinkers or revelers. Stuyvesant was even more disliked when he closed the taverns on Sunday mornings and told the people to go to church instead. There is little evidence his admonishment was heeded.

Personally, Peter Stuyvesant showed intolerance to public worship by certain groups, such as Anabaptists, Quakers, and Lutherans. They were allowed to meet privately in homes. In contrast, Amsterdam as an European city was quite tolerant of the many who fled from wars and persecutions, secular and religious, from the rest of Europe.

The Dutch ultimately realized the need more colonists. They seized on the idea of patroonships--grants of large areas of land, to those with means to develop the areas, as a potential way to increase the population of New Netherland. All of the patroonships failed, except the one awarded to Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. Rensselaer was an Amsterdam jewel merchant. The Lords Herren had granted him thousands of acres of land on both sides of the river near Fort Orange, now Albany. Van Rensselaer, the elder, never travelled to New Amsterdam, though he sent three of his sons at first on a rotation basis to supervise his large land holdings and fur trading. They used employees, indentured servants, and slaves to provide additional needed labor.

Adrien Van der Donk, a recent graduate in Law at Leiden University, volunteered to assist the interests of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, who hired him in 1641 as a combination sheriff and public prosecutor for his patroonship. Van der Donk later moved to New Amsterdam to become an advisor to Peter Stuyvesant and the latter picked him to be president of the Council of Nine. Stuyvesant even awarded him a twelve-mile long stretch of land on the eastern bank of the North River, now an area that includes the Bronx. Stuyvesant only rarely called the

Council of Nine together, ruling instead by issuing autocratic decrees. As Van der Donk witnessed Stuyvesant's manner of ruling the colonists, he concluded that Stuyvesant should be replaced as Director General. He communicated this in a letter to the Nineteen Lords Herren in Amsterdam. Stuyvesant was very angry when word of this letter got back to him. To settle this disagreement, Van der Donk, along with several supporters and a few adversaries as well, were recalled as a group to report to the Nineteen Lords Herren of the Dutch West Indies Company. Van der Donk appeared repeatedly before the council at intervals for over a year to present arguments why Stuyvesant should be replaced as governor.

While Van der Donk was back in his homeland, he used this time to give lectures and even published a book in 1655, *A Description of New Netherland*<sup>2</sup> that painted the colony in glowing terms as a virtual Eden to those he was encouraging to emigrate. Van der Donk said: "New Netherland is a very beautiful, pleasant, healthy, and delightful land, where all manner of men can more easily earn a good living and make their way in the world than in the Netherlands or any other part of the globe that I know"

But most well-off Dutchmen had little reason to leave Holland. A good many of those who were recruited to serve as soldiers, farmers, artisans, laborers, and servants in the colonies were recent immigrants into Holland.

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<sup>2</sup> Van der Donck, Adrien, *A Description of New Netherlands*. Trans. Jeremias Johnson, ed. Thomas F. O'Donnell. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1968.

Nevertheless, Van der Donk was able to recruit fifty colonists and arranged for a ship so they could sail back with him, as additional settlers for New Netherland. Van der Donk knew that without more Dutch colonists, the English, already spreading into Connecticut and eastern Long Island would ultimately infringe ever further into the Dutch territories.

After a year of dithering, the Nineteen Lords Herren were about to replace Stuyvesant as Director General of New Amsterdam. Then in 1650, a twist of history changed everything. When Oliver Cromwell declared war on the Dutch, this Anglo-Dutch war turned Van der Donk into an “undesirable”, as Van der Donk’s cause seemed almost treasonous to the Lords Herren. Van der Donk was forbidden to sail with the boatload of colonists he had recruited. It took two more years of Van der Donk’s repeated pleading before he was allowed to return to his farm on Manhattan and rejoin his family, but only with the stipulation he was never again to challenge Stuyvesant.

But we must return to our initial question, just why would a Dutchman choose to go to New Netherland? Perhaps my own family history can be used as an example.

In the late 1500’s one Derick Martense Schenck (the middle name a patronymic that he was a son of Martin) lived in a small castle, Schloss Bleijenbeek near Afferden in Dutch Gelderland. Derick had five children by his maid. Derick Schenck and the priest in the local Catholic church at Afferden on the Maas River had always disliked each other and Derick, for unknown reasons, had never bothered to get married.

But Derick’s children said, “Our parents are getting older, and we have to get them married!” “What should we do?” First there was a surreptitious call for the priest to administer last rites from a direction away from the village of Afferden and away from Schloss Blijenbeek.

The children then brought the priest's assistant to the small castle. Can you picture this wedding scene? A witness on a ladder is peering in to Derick's second floor bedroom. A hand was visible outside the drapes of a four poster bed. Derick and his maid were in due course declared "married". Unfortunately, the groom may not have been fully conscious or even alive at the time, for it was not too long after the wedding, that Derick was declared dead!

The Van der Lippe cousins then filed for inheritance of the land, claiming the Schenck children were illegitimate. Legal challenges ground slowly then, and a final decision in Rome may have been further delayed because of the 80 Years War of Holland with Spain. That war ended with the Treaty of Munster in 1648. It was soon after this that the final decision about Derick's marriage<sup>3</sup> was ultimately issued by Rome, many years after Derick's marriage and death. The Van der Lippes got the land, though the Schencks benefited from a cash settlement of five thousand guilders.

Roelof Martense Schenck, his brother Jan Martense Schenck and their sister Annetjke Martense Schenck came to New Amsterdam in 1650. They realized immigration was another way once again to own land. but getting to New Amsterdam required a payment of 100 guilders per person to a ship's captain for passage across the ocean. The money may have come from the settlement with the van der Lippes. One of the Van Rensselaer indentured patroonship workers was Pieter Claesen Wyckoff. He was but an illiterate 16-year-old Frieslander youth when he made his "X" and was sent over in 1636 from Amsterdam. He was a dependable worker and after his six years indentured service had

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<sup>3</sup> Ferber, Heinrich, Neuberger, Marijke T., Trans. *History of the Family of Schenk Von Nydeggen, 1225-1860*, Gateway Press, Inc., Baltimore, 1987.

been fulfilled, he moved down river to Flatlands, renamed Amersfort, and Flatbush, villages now included in Brooklyn.

Pieter Claeszen Wyckoff managed to gradually purchase ever more land than the few acres Stuyvesant awarded new farm settlers. Wyckoff rarely sold a plot of land. He just gradually kept acquiring more and more farm land. He also prided himself that his children had married “up the social ladder.”<sup>4</sup> His example was that his daughter, Annetje, as the second wife, had married the “wealthy” Roelof Martense Schenck, my progenitor.

Wyckoff only sold land twice in his entire life time. One plot of land he disposed of was to his son Claes, and the other plot of land was sold to his son-in-law Roelof’s Schenck’s brother, Jan Martense Schenck.

The Flatbush Reformed Church repeatedly requested that a Minister, or Domine, from Holland be sent. But the Domine’s salary support first had to be guaranteed. To ensure fairness, various land owners’ relative wealth were assessed. An individual’s fair share could then be determined.

Wyckoff’s currently living descendants are still proud today that their progenitor, Pieter Claeszen Wyckoff, who once had arrived as an indentured and illiterate servant, before his death had not only fathered nine children but had a net worth of 300 guilders, “which were 60 guilders more than his chief competitor”. Who could that be? You were right if you guessed that the “chief competitor” was my progenitor, Roelof Martense Schenck, Magistrate of Amersfort, and later sheriff of Kings County and whose estate was then valued at 240 guilders. Roelof’s brother, Jan Martense Schenck of Flatbush, NY, must

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<sup>4</sup> Wagman, Morton, *The Rise of Pieter Claessen Wyckoff: Social Mobility on the Colonial Frontier*, New York Times, Aug. 20, 1970.

not have been a pauper either. For Jan's original house, as well the house of his grandson, Nicholas Schenck, both with period furniture are now on permanent exhibit within the Brooklyn Museum. You can see the houses and their furnishings on your next trip to New York.

What soon happened, was that the English, by the hundreds and ultimately thousands, flooded into New England, Connecticut, and the eastern half of Long Island. They came in greater numbers than the Dutch, and eventually pushed Roelof's and Jan's descendants to seek more fertile and cheaply available land in New Jersey. By 1664, New Netherland had only a total of 9,000 Dutch, compared to the English colonial populations of 50,000 in New England and 40,000 thousand in Virginia.

And how did New Amsterdam become New York? James, the Duke of York, and the brother of King Charles II, sent four ships to take Fort Amsterdam. By then, the fort was rather decrepit. The few colonists on the island had insufficient guns, or dry powder. Most importantly they lacked the will to defend their island and New Amsterdam. They reasoned that in resisting the English, they would be defeated, and they would lose their property. Despite Stuyvesant's entreaties, the New Amsterdam inhabitants simply refused to fight.

Stuyvesant reluctantly accepted the terms of surrender on Monday, Sept. 8, 1664. Over time the imbalance of numbers of English to Dutch in the population became ever more disproportionate. Many of the Schenck descendants moved from Long Island to Monmouth and other New Jersey Counties.

On April 18, 1667, the Treaty of Breda, was signed ending the Second Anglo-Dutch war. In the interim, the Dutch had seized Suriname in South America. Negotiations between England and Holland had reached a point that each would have to surrender a territory. Hugo

Grotius was the Dutch “Father of International Law.” His greatest work was *On the Law of War and Peace*. He believed in an international society, asserting that states are bound together by a body of laws and that individuals and non-state entities have rights and duties that give them a place in a “great society of all mankind.”

When it came time for a settlement, Grotius’ principles of law strived for justice and equilibrium. The Dutch had a choice, either to ask for New Amsterdam and New Netherland back, but return Suriname with its sugar plantations to the English, or *vice versa*. The Dutch thought they had the better deal economically by keeping Suriname and letting the British have New Netherland, which included the island of Manhattan. The island of *Pulau Run* with its nutmeg riches in Indonesia was thrown in as a bonus to the Dutch. The Dutch did not foresee how the then small population of New Amsterdam would grow into current day New York City. And with New York, the English would be able to establish the entire Atlantic coastline as English colonies. Nor did anyone foresee that 100 more years into the future, these colonies would become the first thirteen American states, the United States of America.

The opportunity for better and cheaper land encouraged Dutch farmers to migrate further and further west, including Kentucky and Ohio. Lure of this good land, at very low cost, prompted migration of my own line of Schenck ancestors from New Jersey into southwestern Ohio.

My great-great-grandfather Peter P. Schenck was born May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1801, in New Jersey. His father Gerret G. Schenck was a revolutionary war veteran, and his mother was Jane Van Kirk Schenck. When just 16 years of age, Peter P. Schenck in 1817 moved with his parents from New Jersey to Franklin, Warren County, in Southwestern Ohio. He married in 1821 and had two sons, William and Henry Schenck. Just three years ago I located the impressive marble headstone of Peter P Schenck’s

grave in Pleasant Hill Cemetery in southwest Ohio. That very evening our car was struck by a deer, and I thought it would have been ironic if I had been killed on that day!

In 1857, at age 30, William migrated from southwestern Ohio, to the rich prairie land near Elmwood, Peoria County, Illinois.

That's where I was born in 1931. I am a member of the twelfth generation of Schencks in America! I was also the first in my genealogical line to have not been a life-long farmer, but became a hand and microsurgeon at Rush University.

My Dutch cultural legacy affects my life to this day. We ask, "Who are we, and why are we the way we are?" These existential questions prompted my early research into my Dutch heritage when I was a young man in my twenties. This presentation allowed me to do more in the way of self-discovery and, and in the broadest sense, father identification.

I have enjoyed sharing with you some of the reasons the Schencks, Wyckoffs, Von der Donks, and 1400 others with family names such as Bogart, Roosevelt, Van Buren, and Vanderbilt came to this New World, 340 or more years ago.

Two hundred years later, in 1876, an organization, The Holland Society of New York, was founded by men with a traceable direct male line back to a progenitor who had lived in New Amsterdam before the second and final handover to the British in 1676.

Just this last April 6<sup>th</sup>, I completed a two-year term as the 73<sup>rd</sup> President of the Holland Society of New York. I was able to oversee a change that had failed four times previously. It was a change in the Holland Society of New York's Constitution that for the first time allows women born with the same surname as their brothers, to now be full members.

And what of the Dutch contribution to our United States of America? The candle they helped light on the rocky hill of the Isle of Manhattan, Including the Dutch emphasis on tolerance, and of separating one's freedom to worship from interference by the State, are lessons still worth relearning and applying today.

Our representative form of government can be traced back to the Dutch. Remember the Dutch Act of Abjuration, in 1581, when the Dutch threw off the shackles of a mandatory religion? Thomas Jefferson, in writing our Declaration of Independence, used parallel words and logic about an insensitive royal. According to legal authors Albert and Julia Rosenblatt, "Religious plurality and ethnic diversity can be directly traced back to that sixteenth-century Netherlandic struggle for freedom of religion and political independence from tyranny."<sup>5</sup> John Adams, our first ambassador to the Netherlands, in comparing the Dutch Republic and the United States of America, said, "The originals of the two Republics are so much alike that the history of the one seems but a transcript of the other."<sup>6</sup>

New York, whose state legislature was still 50 per cent Dutch in 1776, would, along with the state of Virginia, not "sign off" on our Constitution, until a Bill of Rights had been written.

The forerunner of New York City was New Amsterdam, with 27 languages heard on its dusty streets. It was a forecast of the millions who have since entered our country, all hoping for a new life of freedom, abundance, satisfaction and peace...indeed, the right to pursue happiness, with liberty and justice for all.

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<sup>5</sup> Rosenblatt, Albert M. and Rosenblatt, Julia C., *Opening Statements—Law, Jurisprudence and the Legacy of Dutch New York*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2013

<sup>6</sup> Adams, Samuel, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York Library of America, 1984). 16.

This is my “Dutch Treat!” Enjoy!

Thank you.

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