

Peter Stuyvesant and the Jews of New Netherland

Source: Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York, V. III Albany NY: Weed, Parsons (1883)

A. Letter from the Directors in Holland to Stuyvesant: Jews; Taxes and the Refusal of the People to be taxed without their consent; Revenues; Fort on Long Island; Boundaries.

We would have liked to agree to your wishes and request, that the new territories should not be further invaded by people of the Jewish race, for we foresee from such immigration the same difficulties, which you fear, but after having further weighed and considered this matter, we observe, that it would be unreasonable and unfair, especially because of the considerable loss, sustained by the Jews in the taking of Brasil and also because of the large amount of capital, which they have invested in shares of this Company. After many consultations we have decided and resolved upon a certain petition made by said Portuguese Jews, that they shall have permission to and trade in New Netherland and to live and remain there, provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the Company or the community, but be supported by their own nation. You will govern yourself accordingly. (315)

B. Letter from the Directors to Stuyvesant: Trade between Virginia and New Netherland Prohibited; Jews; Lutherans; Public Record.

We have seen and heard with displeasure, that against our orders of the 15th of February 1655, issued at the request of the Jewish or Portuguese nation, you have forbidden them to trade to Fort Orange and the South river, also the purchase of real estate, which is granted to them without difficulty here in this country, and we wish it had not been done and that you had obeyed our orders, which you must always execute punctually and with more respect: Jews or Portuguese people however shall not be employed in any public service, (to which they are neither admitted in this city), nor allowed to have open retail shops, but they may quietly and peacefully carry on their business as before said and exercise in all quietness their religion within their houses, for which end they must without doubt endeavor to build their houses close together in a convenient place on one or the other side of New Amsterdam, at their own choice as they have done here. (351)

C. Letter from the Directors to Stuyvesant: Jews to have some privileges; Indian Raid on New Amsterdam; Hartford Treaty; Emigration. The 13th of March 1656.

The permission given to the Jews, to go to New Netherland and enjoy there the same privileges, as they have here, has been granted only as far as civil and political rights are concerned, without giving the said Jews a claim to the privilege of exercising their religion in a synagogue or at a gathering; as long therefore, as you receive no request for granting them this liberty of religious exercise, your considerations and anxiety about this matter, are premature and when later something shall be said about it, you can do no better, than to refer them to us and await the necessary order. Your next remark concerning trade does not as yet divert us from our resolution, nor do your complaints about the sailing to and fro of the "Scots," because for the sake of increasing the population, trade and its freedom must not be hampered with, but ought to be relived from all restrictions. However, to prevent complaints from the burghers and free people living there, we have made some modifications in our letter of March 12th, 1654, which are still in force; we only add, that we have been informed by trustworthy persons, that divers people going over, soldiers, sailors, even supercargoes dare to take with them goods and merchandise without paying freight or at least duties for them: you must see to it, that the Fiscal pay proper attention, as we shall do here; for we can well understand, that other honest people cannot compete with such and have therefore good reason to complain of unequal taxation. (341)