

The Sabbath Keeper

In 1647, Peter Stuyvesant tried to reform New Amsterdam's tavern culture. He failed.

SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING IN THE COLONY OF NEW AMSTERDAM IN 1647 TO TAKE UP THE POST OF Director-General, Peter Stuyvesant observed that the colonists he encountered, much to his disappointment, were a "feeble lukewarm and fainthearted congregation." Stuyvesant quickly moved to mold New Amsterdam into an orthodox Protestant society, inflicting harsh punishments on those who led intemperate lives and forbidding "Firing of Guns. . . Planting of May Poles . . . [and] beating of Drums on New Year's and May Days," activities he felt would incite people to immoral behavior.

BY JOYCE D. GOODFRIEND

The focus of Stuyvesant's campaign was the Sabbath. Disturbed by the widespread profanation of the day of rest in New Amsterdam, he enacted a series of increasingly stringent laws that prohibited everything from fishing and hunting to trading with the Indians on Sundays. But his primary target was the town's ubiquitous taverns, where Europeans, Africans, and Indians drank beer and brandy, gambled, and brawled. Outraged that taverns were abetting the



FACING PAGE: Peter Stuyvesant, the devout son of a minister, was outraged by immoral behavior on the Sabbath in New Amsterdam. INSET, RIGHT: Reconstructed shards of a drinking vessel that might have been used in a New Amsterdam tavern.



desecration of the holiest day in the week, Stuyvesant exercised his considerable power to curtail Sunday revelry in New Amsterdam's drinking places.

Stuyvesant's crackdown began shortly after his arrival in New Amsterdam after witnessing "the great wantonness in which some of our inhabitants indulge, in excessive drinking, quarreling, fighting and brawling even on the Lord's day of rest." In May 1647, he ordered that "no brewers, tapsters and innkeepers shall be allowed on... Sunday...before two o'clock if there is no sermon or otherwise before four o'clock in the afternoon, to offer, tap or serve any people wine, beer or strong spirits of any sort... except for travelers and daily boarders."

Dismayed that the Sabbath was "still profaned and desecrated" in spite of former edicts, Stuyvesant issued a more sweeping ordinance in April 1648 that not only "forbid during divine service, all tapping, fishing, hunting, and other customary avocations, trading and business, either in houses, cellars, shops, ships, yachts, or in the streets and markets," but with the minister's advice, "deemed it expedient that a sermon shall be preached from the Sacred Scriptures and the usual prayers and thanksgiving offered from this time forward in the afternoon as well as in the forenoon."

Not unlike their compatriots in the homeland, New Amsterdammers were addicted to drink. This local propensity for alcohol was specifically linked to religious deficiencies by Domine (pastor) Backerus, who reported that his congregants were "very ignorant in regard to religion and very much given to drink. To this they are led by the seventeen tap-houses here."

Whether the ready availability of alcohol in New Amsterdam caused disaffection from religion or just reflected a general indifference to spiritual concerns, there is little doubt that Bible-based Calvinist culture had a formidable rival in tavern culture. As centers of sociability, taverns played an essential role in this seaport society. "Nearly the just fourth of the city of New Amsterdam [in 1648] consists of brandy shops, tobacco or beer houses," noted Stuyvesant, who was at pains to differentiate between "decent taverns established and licensed for the use and accommodation of travelers, strangers, and

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inhabitants," "clandestine grogeries," and "ale-houses and tipping places."

New Amsterdam's taverns varied not only in size but in clientele, serving everyone from the well-to-do to transient seamen, servants, enslaved Africans, and Indians. Despite ordinances prohibiting the sale of alcohol to Indians, Native Americans consistently gained access to local drinking places. On August 28, 1654, the Director-General and council noted that "many and diverse Indians are almost daily seen drunk and intoxicated within the city."

Several New Amsterdam tavernkeepers were condemned for breaking these laws: Nicolaes Terhaer for "tapping to the Indians on Sunday during sermon as well as at other times [1654]," Michel Tades for selling brandy/liquor to Indians [1656], and Lysbet Ackerman for having drawn beer for two Indians [1663]. Some tavernkeepers proved incorrigible, even after Stuyvesant had gone so far as to deport Sander Toursen and his wife for selling brandy to two Indians in 1656. Migiel Tades, who had been punished severely for a previous offense, was brought before the court again in July 1664 for "having tapped on Sunday to twelve Indians." In his defense, Tades explained that "the Indians came drunk to his house and he tapped small beer for them, but no strong beer."

New Amsterdam's

denizens resorted to taverns not only to imbibe, but to join with friends in clubs. In 1654, authorities learned that there were "drinking clubs on divers nights at the house of Jan Peck, with dancing and jumping and entertainment of disorderly people." Jan Rutgerzen was brought to Court in 1661 for "having tapped and kept a club during the preaching and having discovered 5 [or] 6 persons there." At their favorite taverns, people amused themselves by playing games. In 1661, Hendrick Assuerus "sold liquor to sundry persons,

and permitted them to play at ninepins during divine service." On a Sunday in 1663, there were found at Andries Joghimzen's house "seven [or] eight persons bowling and two others sitting ticktacking or playing backgammon."

From the beginning of his term as New Netherland's Director-General, Stuyvesant viewed the dissoluteness of tavern life as symptomatic of the deviation of New Amsterdam's men and women from the path prescribed by the Bible. Though many taverngoers might well have thought of themselves as practicing Christians, they did not embrace the exacting Calvinist standards Stuyvesant championed. To them, drinking and gaming were an integral part of everyday life. Proscribing these pleasures on the Sabbath was tantamount to depriving Dutch men and women of their rights. By circumventing the onerous Sabbath regulations local people were expressing their antipathy to the strict interpretation of the Sabbath Stuyvesant had codified in the laws of New Netherland.

Their voices can be heard on rare occasions through the testimony of tavernkeepers. To defend herself from the charge that "there were nine pins at her house last Sunday during preaching, and the can and the glass stood on the table," Andries Rees's wife related that "some came to her house, who said that Church was out, and that one had a pin and the other a bowl in the hand, but they did not play."

The popular contention that drinking and gaming need be curtailed only during the exact hours of divine service on the Sabbath was also frequently articulated by the proprietors of drinking establishments. When the [Schout] found "eight [or] ten persons playing at ninepins and two at backgammon and as many as fifteen [or] sixteen persons, either bowling or drinking" at Andries Rees's tavern on a Sunday in 1663 Rees admitted the infraction, but said "it was full two hours after the afternoon's sermon preaching and he did no business during the week."

Drinking and Gambling in New Amsterdam

THE SIX-INCH-DIAMETER SCROLL-HANDLED DELFT POSSET POT OR LOVING cup shown on the first page of this story was one of many tavern-related artifacts found within the confines of a small early eighteenth-century building at the Broad Financial Center site. Possets were made of hot milk curdled with ale, wine, or other liquors, and infused with spices. Most often associated with celebratory occasions, possets were also used to nourish the sick. The curd, floating above the liquor, was eaten with a spoon, and the liquid below was either sucked or poured from the spout.

The whistle at right, which was carved from a broken pipe, might have been used for entertainment in the city's taverns. Mid- to late-seventeenth century whistles were also recovered at Fort Orange (Albany), leading archaeologists to speculate that these objects might have been traded (along with other goods) to Native Americans in return for furs.

The gambling tokens at right could have been used in the popular board games of the time. These included backgammon, cribbage, and pachisi. These clear, lead-glazed, red earthenware tokens were recovered from the earlier of the two Kierstede privies (circa 1647-1680) located on Pearl Street.

The typical seventeenth-century Rhenish drinking glass fragments (below) include forest-green-colored, raspberry-shaped prunts made of Waldglas that are identical to those used on goblets found in the Netherlands. The fragment of green glass roemer (goblet) with two applied raspberry prunts and a coil wound foot, dating from after 1630, was recovered from a privy associated with a small house owned by Jacob Haie, circa 1653. The use of these Dutch drinking vessels suggests that many residents of New Amsterdam were attempting to replicate the lifestyle found at home in the Netherlands.

This seventeenth-century whistle was carved from a broken clay tobacco pipe stem. It was recovered from a red brick privy located on property owned by Dr. Hans and Sara Kierstede.



These broken shards of pottery were deliberately reshaped and used as gaming pieces or gambling tokens in New Amsterdam's taverns.



Drinking glass fragments include raspberry-shaped prunts used to decorate goblets or roemers and part of a lined or milled beaker used in a drinking game in which a player would drink down to the milled line on the glass, then pass it on to the next player, and so on.



Playing board games was a popular way to socialize in the Netherlands, as shown in the painting, "Tric Trac Players in an Interior" (ca. 1646-1679) by Jan Steen. Peter Stuyvesant tried to ban the playing of tric trac and other games on the Sabbath.



At times, tavernkeepers defended themselves by splitting hairs. Hans Styn claimed that he served only strangers on Sunday. When Salomon La Chair was reprovved for desecrating the Sabbath, he retorted that "he had been on the watch and coming home in the morning he tapped a little drop for himself, of which some remained in the glass." To the officer's further charge that he had "found a glass with beer or something else...in it," in the afternoon, La Chair retorted that "some beer remained in the glass, from what his children had asked for."

To eliminate the technicalities that Sabbath violators seized on to rationalize their conduct, Stuyvesant went on the offensive again in 1663, enacting a new

Sabbath law that sacralized the entire day. Alleging that former laws had been "misinterpreted and misconstrued" by some to mean that they "applied to the maintaining and solemnizing only half the Sabbath," the Director-General ordered that "not only a part, but the whole Sabbath shall be observed." Everyone was warned that "pending the Sabbath, from the rising to the setting of the sun no customary labor shall be performed much less any clubs kept." By forbidding "all unusual exercises, such as games, boat, cart or wagon racing, fishing, fowling, running, sailing, nutting or picking strawberries, trafficking with Indians or any like things, and amongst others all dissolute and licentious plays, riots, calling children out to

the streets and highways," Stuyvesant was literally compiling a catalogue of townspeople's Sunday amusements.

Even before Stuyvesant revised the Sabbath law in September 1663, city officials found ways to undercut his strict Sabbath policy. In June 1663, Court Messenger Claes van Elslandt the younger, accused by Stuyvesant of failing to warn the tavernkeepers and tapsters not to allow gaming on Sunday, answered: "Such may well be, but he had forgotten it, as he had many orders from His Honor." Van Elslandt's selective loss of memory can be interpreted as a sign of his distaste for the strict Sabbath rules.

To enforce the Sabbath rules, Stuyvesant depended on Schout Pieter Tonneman, a

council member and kerckmaster, who zealously pursued tavernkeepers who violated not only the Sabbath law but the curfew which mandated no tapping after the watch was set. Tonneman, clearly unpopular among the townspeople, also aroused the ire of the burgomasters and schepens, who at times rejected his recommendations for punishing offenders. They refused to fine Andries Rees, who had tapped on Sunday after the sermon, causing Tonneman to appeal their judgment. They also excused Migiel Tades, the supplier of alcohol to the Indians, on his oath. In overriding Tonneman and exhibiting leniency toward violators of the Sabbath law, the burgomasters and schepens were registering their displeasure at Stuyvesant's efforts to turn New Amsterdam into a Calvinist community—a pattern that remained constant (see "Compassionate Calvinism," page 26).

On September 15, 1663 the Director-General transmitted the new Sabbath law to the city authorities with instructions to have it read from the stand in front of city hall, but they did not do so. Six months later in March 1664, he sent the law again and inquired why they had withheld it from the public. At this juncture, the burgomasters, noting that they had "felt themselves aggrieved in some particulars," articulated their disagreement with the content of the law. They had not communicated the law to the populace, they explained, because even though they "judge[d] the observance thereof to be highly necessary, [they] should not dare to publish such a Placard as divers sections thereof are too severe and too much opposed to Dutch liberties."

Having, in essence, confronted Stuyvesant, the burgomasters stood their ground and refused to enforce the new law, delaying cases brought to the court by Tonneman until the issue was resolved. In April 1664, they postponed judgment in three cases. Noting that "the Placards dated 26th Octob 1656 and 15th Sept 1663 on the observance of the Sabbath contradict each other," they resolved to speak to the Director-General and Council on this subject. For good measure they raised what was obviously another grievance, asking "for what reason those,

The inhabitants took a perverse delight in deliberately engaging in illegal activities on the Sabbath.

who reside beyond the Fresh Water are allowed to tap more on the Sabbath than the tavernkeepers of the city."

Significantly, two of the cases that were postponed involved larger assemblies of Sunday drinkers than had ever before been prosecuted in New Amsterdam. Jan Schryver was charged with letting twenty persons drink in his house on Sunday afternoon, April 6, 1664, after the second sermon. That same day, Schout Tonneman had found twenty-two persons drinking at the house of Hendrick Jansen Smitt. New Amsterdam's residents, emboldened by the knowledge that the burgomasters disliked the restrictive Sabbath policy, openly defied Stuyvesant's new Sabbath law. Confident of popular support, the burgomasters prepared a petition to Stuyvesant in which they asserted that "there are in the last Placard some points in direct opposition to the custom of Holland."

Though the conflict of opinion between the burgomasters and Stuyvesant was not resolved due to the English capture of New Netherland in September 1664, it is evident that Director-General Stuyvesant, despite the power that derived from his office, could not prevail on the bulk of New Amsterdam's population to conform to Calvinist ideals of the Sabbath. Stuyvesant's experiment never succeeded, not least because ordinary men and women persisted in the belief that a wide variety of activities could be pursued on the Sabbath.

While most residents of New Amsterdam maintained links to the local church, if only as a place to marry and have their children baptized, what set them apart from Stuyvesant and his orthodox allies was their conception of sacred time. Stuyvesant believed that the Sabbath lasted twenty-four hours, but to them sacred time was confined to the few hours when the sermon was delivered. When accused of violating the Sabbath law, they stressed the fact that their activities took place "after church was out" or "after preaching." In doing so, they not only conceded the legitimacy of sacred time

(however limited in scope), but validated the religious framework that structured their lives. Their opposition to strict Sabbath laws stemmed neither from hostility to the Reformed church as an institution nor from repudiation of the tenets of the Reformed faith, but rather from an unwillingness to be encumbered by the sober lifestyle advocated by Stuyvesant.

Popular beliefs surrounding the Sabbath endured long after Stuyvesant surrendered the reins of government to the English in 1664. In August 1673, soon after the Netherlands recaptured the colony of New York from the English and renamed the city New Orange, the new Dutch rulers acted to restore strict Sabbath rules. Deploring the fact that "many of the inhabitants almost make it a custom, in place of observing the Sabbath, as it ought to be observed, to frequent the taverns more than on other days and to take their delight in illegal exercises," they prohibited "from sunrise to sundown on Sunday all sorts of handicraft, trade and traffick, gaming, boat racing, or running with carts or wagons, fishing, fowling, running and picking nuts, strawberries, etc. all riotous racing, calling and shouting of children in the streets, together with all unlawful exercises and games, drunkenness, frequenting taverns or taphouses, dancing, cardplaying, ballplaying, rolling ninepins or bowls etc which is more in vogue on this than on any other day."

New Orange's inhabitants, most of whom had lived in Stuyvesant's New Amsterdam, it seems, took a perverse delight in deliberately engaging in forbidden activities on the Sabbath. Perhaps this is sufficient testimony that Stuyvesant ultimately lost the battle over the Sabbath.

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