

The Wall that becomes a Street

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During the first Anglo-Dutch war (1652-1654) tensions rose between New England and New Netherland as this European naval conflict threatened to spill over into the New World. In the spring of 1653 a delegation from New England visited Director General Petrus Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam with accusations that he had incited Indians to attack settlements in Connecticut. When Stuyvesant denied the charges, the New Englanders left abruptly for a conference in Boston, leaving the impression that military action would soon follow. Stuyvesant responded to the threat by strengthening his defenses on Manhattan. In addition to repairing Fort Amsterdam plans were made to construct a defensive work across Manhattan on the northern edge of the city.

According to the minutes of the construction committee dated 17 March 1653, initial plans called for palisades 12 feet long, 18 inches in circumference, and sharpened at the upper end to be set in line across the island. Behind the palisades a breastwork would be constructed 4 feet high, 4 feet at the bottom and 3 feet at the top, covered with sod, with a ditch 3 feet wide and 2 feet deep, 2 ½ feet within the breastwork (see sketch which appears in margin of original document). The total length of ground to be lined with palisades was 180 rods (a rod = 13 feet). However, when the job was put up for bid no one came close to the committee's offer of *f*25 a rod. The lowest bid was *f*40 per rod, which would have amounted to a total of *f*7200 for the job. The committee decided to downsize the project by using planks instead of palisades. The specifications of expenses were: 180 rods make 2340 feet, 15 feet to the plank make 156 planks in length, 9 planks high, altogether 1404 planks at *f*1 ½ per plank, amounting to *f*2106. 340 posts at *f*340; nails at *f*100; transport costs at *f*120; labor for setting them up and carpenters' wages *f*500. Total *f*3166.