



**ARENT VAN CURLER & THE FLATTS**  
**History, Archaeology & Art Illuminate a Life on the Hudson**

**DOCUMENTS**

**Letter of Kiliaen van Rensselaer to Arent van Curler, March 16, 1643**

*Arent Van Corler* in New Netherland

This 16th of March 1643, in Amsterdam I am in receipt of your letters of the 18th and 26th of August, hastily written at the manhatans, to which I can not properly reply on account of my annoyance that last year you did not send me any accounts or book?. You make me suspicious. You will learn of my dissatisfaction through Megapolensis, as I can write more calmly to him about such wrongs than to you. You know that since you left the country your father and now lately your uncle *boldewyn* have died and you would also make me pass away my life without knowing once, in all the years that you have been there, how you have administered my property. I have offered you help but you reply that you can manage it alone. I do not know what has become of the merchandise which I sent you ; I do not know what the farms which are there cost me; I do not know what the house that you live in cost me; I do not know what you have eaten up or given away ; I do not know whether or not you have kept proper record of all the consignments; I do not know how my account there stands with the Company, except that *kieft*, of his own accord, charges me on behalf of the Company for freight three times as much as I owe and for duty the same as others though for 10 years I do not have to pay any conveyance charges on goods going thither; for the furs coming hither however I must pay one guilder here, each time, before I can get my skins. For this amount you furnish in advance wheat from the colony, which is as if I threw money into the water, for if I should furnish wheat in payment of such freight charges and duties I must be a fool and an idiot. You should have referred the duties and freight charges to me and not furnished any wheat except to settle a debt, for merchandise, furs or bills of exchange on the Company, according to my agreement with the Company of which I sent you a copy. Mr *kieft* knew how to protect the rights of his masters but you have protected the rights of your master like a child. I hoped from year to year that matters would

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improve and that some day I should get the accounts and books, but I do not get them and if meanwhile I should happen to die, as my children are still young and do not know the exact situation, I should lose everything. Yes, just lately, you have caused 12 lasts of wheat to be delivered and you do not even write me about it, let alone that you should send me bills of exchange or furs thereof. What must become of this? Do you want to ruin me and yourself and do you not think that you must answer for all that? Therefore, listen to and follow the advice which *D<sup>e</sup> Megapolensis* will give and read to you. Do not neglect your duty unless you want to make yourself the laughing-stock of all people. If the books and accounts are not entirely closed, or not even half closed, send them as they are. If you had done that long ago, I could have seen by them what your management was and have instructed and advised you. Now you pile it all on top of each other. The more I tried to advance you, the less information I received. In two of your last letters you write me that you have no skins, seawan or anything in stock, not of the last consignment which had not begun to be sold yet, but of the preceding consignment; you do not even write me what persons I am in debt to and who are in debt to me. In sum, for five years, which may mean life or death to a man of advanced years, I do not know what has happened in my name and on my behalf in such a far-off country and my long patience begins to change to impatience. You have now had charge of about f36000 worth of goods, at the purchase price here, of which I have not yet received a single account. Follow the advice of *Domine Megapolensis* and do not lightly reject the advice of *hooges*, although he is younger than you and not so experienced; I consider him an upright young man. If your charge is too heavy for you, you should have asked for help. To close this quarrel, make at once on receipt of this letter a list and inventory of all the merchandise and be especially careful that the duffels do not get damaged, wet or eaten by rats. Make also a list of the furs, seawan, debts to be paid and to be collected, in order that you may be ready when the ships arrive and send me some furs by each ship. There are still 1400 skins insured. which I expected already last year in return for the goods sent by *hooges*. I want yearly to have accounts and returns or I shall entirely stop sending things. I notice that there are many stallions in the colony. It would have been better if some had been gelded while young, for so many stallions are too hard on the mares. From the letter written while among the mahkans I understand that the matter with *p<sup>ter</sup> Cornelissen* and *Cornelis teunissen* was settled. Let this agreement be carefully observed and the papers examined point for point, for *p<sup>ter</sup>*

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*Cornelissen* can easily say that the patroon's documents must not be taken literally but interpreted somewhat freely, so that care must be taken that he does not defraud me by furnishing me more than I need or poor stuff. I understand that *vander donck* will establish his farm at the south end of West Island, which is satisfactory to me as he will then be opposite and not far from the church neighborhood where henceforth all the mechanics and freemen must take up their residence. But I hear that you want to put *labatijc* on the farm at the Great Flats and give him f20 a month. What docs he know about farming? I must have further information about this before I can give my consent to it. I do not want farms for myself, for when the ex- penses are shared equally with the farmers great expenses are incurred, and what would the result be if I became alone responsible for the expenses? If I had the accounts of the farmers who have now long gone on half shares, I should know what to say, but now I am blind; therefore, I must have further information as to the basis on which it would be done. Hereafter, it must be no longer a matter of speculation but when I furnish houses and animals I must draw a definite income from it, and I know no more than a child what profit the old farms have been to me. It may turn out better than I think, but I fear that it will result badly and that you will be held responsible, for what measures could I take about things of which I knew nothing? I do not know either what provision you have made for *jan labatie*, who promised to write to me from time to time ; in all I received one letter from him in the beginning and nothing more thereafter. He was engaged as carpenter and ought to serve out those years. You wrote me that in winter when they could not build, he could stay with you to hunt in the woods and supply the table. This he and you must know, that I will not allow any increase of wages except such as is given with my approval and knowledge. The tobacco of *albert andrissen* and his brother sold on an average of 8 1/2 [st] a lb. It weighed 4484 lb gross, deducting 6%, 270 lb, for the stems, there remains 4214 lb net which amounts to f1690:19, of this the Company, counting on 4580 lb, claims a duty of 5%, f 114: 10; freight charges of 1 st per lb, f229; and convoy charges of 1 1/4 st per lb, f286:5; together f629:15; but I do not want to pay them so much and if the tobacco planters in my colony, especially *albert andriesen*, compensate me according to my ordinance for my land on which the tobacco grows I shall see to it that he pays less than half of these expenses, but as long as he is in dispute with me and I with the Company, I must deduct these f629:i5 and also the duty on the tobacco which *huybert jansen*, the son of *Jan Cornelissen*, disposed of very cheaply, which

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[duty] with the cases amounted to f213:15. Adding thereto f20:8 st to *jeronimus La Croijs* for expenses, the total amount is f863:18, so that there remains f93i :i12 net in money, half of which f931:12 should belong to me. However, you must see on what basis this tobacco was sent and whether half of it belongs to me or not. I wish no more than belongs to me. You will therefore pay him there the sum which is due to him of this account in proper goods and at current prices, to be agreed upon with him. If they give me what is right and agree with me as to what I should have from my land, I could reduce the expenses of the Company to at least half of the above amount. I learned here that in Virginia the tobacco, without counting expenses or duties, is worth but 2 st a lb, reckoned by purchase prices in Holland. If this is so, I might send a ship thither also. As to *Andries hudde*, his claim is impertinent and unreasonable. I have a good deal to claim from him, first, f26 paid in his behalf, in the colony' to *Hans hansen*, tobacco planter, for grain. If he had anything to claim from me he should have informed me of it before he turned over the farm and the animals, as I should then have deducted half of the money from the animals bought of *belevelt* whom I paid in full when I received word that the animals had been delivered. Therefore, if he had anything to say he should have spoken then or may see that he gets it from *byievelt* whom I paid in full. As for myself, in addition to the f26, I have the following to claim from *hudde*. In my contract with *byievelt*, of which I sent a copy and which was shown to *hudde*, is written N. B. Board and wages of the ix'ople till May 1632, which *andris hudde* agreed to upon condition that he have the milk and butter; also, feed for the animals till the new planting; so that the butter which he made after the first of May, during the summer, belongs to me. I am further entitled to the seven morgens of winter grain of the new planting of 1632, all of which *hudde* received; also the supply of summer grain, oats, barley, gray peas, which *byievelt* left there, together with the crop proceeding therefrom, which he [*Hudde*] also enjoyed and used to fatten the hogs and hens which he sold. Irle also had the benefit of a well planted garden which *beylevelt* left there and in addition to all this a stack of grain which the council estimated at 90 schepels of rye and wheat, for which I had to pay the Company fioo. All this *hudde* received and yet he is not ashamed to demand money from me who bought all these things from *byievelt* and fully paid him therefor. I have the original of the contract but the authenticated copy, in accordance with which *hudde* turned over the animals and the farms, must be in that country. If it is necessary, I shall send the original to make the impudent fellow rightly pay what he rightly

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owes me, letting him get from *beylevelt* what he has to claim from him; I bought and paid cash for all these things. You might give Director Kieft an extract from this to show the impertinence of *hudde* and also *broer Cornelis* who wrote me for information.

As to the church, if this is not yet contracted for or begun, I should like that the model which I sent be kept back till some other time and that at first and provisionally a suitable place be erected which can be used first for preaching and later on be turned into a dwelling house. This could be made ready quickly, about 26 feet wide and 60 feet long, but the location must remain as directed and this dwelling must be placed with the others in proper order. Next to the house of *D<sup>e</sup>' Megapolensis* would not be un-suitable and later it could be used as a school.

I am surprised that you do not write me at all about the crystal near the house of *michiel Janse* and do not send me any further samples than the little pieces which you sent at first. There may be a great quantity, some pieces larger than others, and these must be dug out with care. I am also surprised that such poor care has been taken of the vine shoots which I imported alive into the colony at great expense and trouble and which are now altogether neglected and dead. I received the inventory of the animals taken by *hooges* it is arranged better than the preceding one but I send herewith a blank which in the future will serve as a model for the inventories. The paper can be taken lengthwise and in that way many more columns made. The cows of the same age must be put on the same line, and after them the horses, specifying the full-grown cows, oxen and bulls, and then in turn heifer calves, oxen and bulls of one and two years, according to the example of the accompanying blank, beginning with those of the year 1640, 1641 and 1642, but those of 1641 and 1642 must be distinguished so as to show the difference. See also to this; I do not know what privilege *albert andriesen* has received that his cows are not mentioned in the Inventory. I do not want any one, no matter who he is, to own any animals which are not subject to the right of preemption. Therefore, have his animals included therein too, or make him leave the colony and pay me for pasturing and hay during the past years. You wrote me that *claes jansen ruyter* promised to give me one half of what he made at the manhatans and that thereupon he obtained permission to leave. What has become of these earnings? Is he ever asked for them? The owners of the ship called *den swarten raevcn*, of which *Willem turck* is

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supercargo, have promised me to bring over some cases of furs on condition that I pay the freight. Do not fail to send me some when it is possible; during the year 1642 I did not receive a single beaver.

The statement that *vanderdonck* seems to have made to you that he was to invest yearly 13000 in merchandise is mere talk ; his contracts must show it. I wrote him and I write to you also that I do not want to hear of verbal statements; everything must be regulated according to my writings, of which you have the originals and I the copies. Every one of you ought to be satisfied to perform his duties but it is every one's duty, apart from his instructions, to seek and to further my advantage. *Vanderdonck* , as my sworn officer, has the right to propose everything that he thinks will serve to my advantage, but in civil actions involving the interests of the patroon (and of the whole colony) the commissioners must examine the proposition and if they reject it, he has a right to protest.

It is strange that all your letters speak of haste. Have you not had time once in five years, to write to me in time and beforehand? Is not that rather strange? You answer my letters from memory; you should put my letters before you and read them paragraph by paragraph and write me what has been done in each case. You write me in every letter that you will send the accounts but you do not do it. In reply to yours of the 29th of June last I will say that it is well that all the merchandise sent was duly received; of the sale thereof and that this year and last year you bartered a good deal with the Indians, I hope to learn in good time. If I could be sure of that, I would insure more than the 1400 skins which are insured now. You might send some at every opportunity. As to the fact that *Kieft* is not willing to pay f10 for the wheat, I do not intend to let him have it for less. You need not refer that to me but should have asked his honor frankly whether he was willing to pay, not by crediting it on undetermined freights and duties but by balancing the amount against debts or in other ways as written heretofore, and if he was not willing; to do so, you should have advised me, telling me at the same time how much I could expect so that I might take proper measures. Now my hands are tied. You furnish in good faith ; I receive no payment and even the price is in dispute. You should have told his honor, if he did not care to pay at the rate of f10 as formerly, that you would have to advise me of it and that I had

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adopted and would adopt other measures. In that way you would have shown that you had sense, for there is no need to sell such staple for less; it has a standard value the world over. What has been written to me about this I consider of no importance. Meanwhile, find out whether the people of Virginia would not be glad to buy the wheat at that price. These are things you ought to pay attention to. For the farmers to sell [the wheat] at f8 or f9) is fraud ; if he could indicate who they are. I shall know how to punish them. Words do not count; deeds must reveal the man completely. I am sick of all this talk that the farmers will not give me more except at f10; it is childish, they must give me one half as belonging to me after the tithes have been deducted; their half is uncertain. Who promised them f10? And furthermore, *brant pelcn*, *crayn Cornelisse* and *broer Cornelis* have accepted the conditions of *maurits jansen* of f6; the farmers from *breda* have agreed to that price also, so that it hinges then upon a few whose leases will soon expire when we shall settle that matter. You excuse them and I do not, for I can get lo masters to one servant. They ought to be ashamed of themselves for having disputed the 16 guilders so long. Are they not aware that everything comes in due time, and that it is a poor sellout who can not wait for his fine and opportunity? Hereafter, they will not torment me so much. As soon as their time is up I shall let others, who can barely make a living here and who often enough apply to me, take charge of the farms of these tormentors, [even if] they all have to go down. If no one stands by you, call upon the officer in a formal way and if he does not assist you then write to me, not generalities but exactly what the matter is. I can then adopt proper measures, but to act on promises, on what people say and repeat, amounts to nothing and produces only confusion. What is uncertain must be set aside and what is clear must be settled. They seem to think that in matters which are uncertain, their wish ought to be consulted before mine. If they defraud me so much in the sending of grain ask *p<sup>tr</sup> Conielissen*, supercargo of the vessel to assist you, also *v<sup>r</sup> donck* in his capacity as officer, and if they refuse to do so, protest against them and write to me, not in a general way that they will not assist you, but stating in what they will not assist you. In that way I can take the necessary measures but not on mere talk. You complain that I am cheated but it is your duty to prevent this in the way described above. You must not listen to any excuses from *vanderdonck* or any one else, but tell them plainly and frankly your duty and theirs, or write to me. If you had done this regularly I would have supported you regularly and, when there was occasion for it, reduced the others in rank and at the end of their term either have called them



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home or dismissed them from their farms. This is the way I intend to proceed in the future, even if I have to send new people altogether who fear God and treat me rightly. You ought to give me the names of the councilors who are unserviceable to me; I would pass those by, but to exclude all is uncalled for. You must ask those who are partial in the matter or themselves guilty to stand outside, and as to the residents, of whom you write that they go to the savages as soon as the latter arrive and spoil the trade, communicate this matter to the officer, notify them at once that they came into the colony without permission and forbid them to trade with the Indians. If they will not obey, call them before the court; and if the court refuses to sentence them, refer the case to me and write me especially how *vanderdonck* behaves in the matter. Should I bear all the expense, possess the jurisdiction from high authority and should strangers be allowed to ruin the trade for me? That is unthinkable. First issue a general prohibition and then prosecute the law breakers. Serve notice on them at their places of residence and if they are obstinate, cause them to be fined; and let *vanderdonck* assist you herein, and you him, and no one will be able to oppose you. I have no objection to your coming over after you send me the accounts; but if you should leave there without sending me the accounts every one would dispute them to your disadvantage and who would know how to settle it but you? Therefore, do not neglect any longer to send them; your coming over depends upon that only. I am not at all willing that you turn the balance of your goods over to *labatije*. He is a foreigner and is under a severe ban in his own country." I have given you *Anthonie de Hooges* as assistant and you must turn it over to him if I do not take other measures. As to their threatening *vanderdonck*, I shall send him help if he conducts himself well and the threateners will think ten times before they act once, for I would make them feel what it means to maltreat the officer. I approve of the farm of *vanderdonck* near *brant peelee* and as to my own on the Great Flats, you must proceed carefully. *Labatie* has no knowledge of farming but if you do it on account of the trade, that is a different matter. If you and *vanderdonck* were united and you had *Labatie* and *hooges* on your side, who could harm you? But *vanderdonck* complains about the impertinence of *Labatij*, You have great plans about the farm at the Great Flats but see to it that it does not become too expensive and that care be taken akjut the servants so that the undertaking may do you credit and be of profit to me. That the farmers refuse to furnish animals without actual payment is not justified by their contract. You must find out who the author of that statement is and give me the name of the man. It must



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be some invention of *Cornelis teunisse*, who in order to avoid paying me what he owes me asks me [to pay] the note of hand which *dirrick Corsen* un- faithfully made out in his name. Let them first settle their ac- counts and then when their lease expires, make an inventory of the increase and loss of animals. The original number must be kept. If I paid them for the increase and a horse or cow died the next day, where would these fellows get another in its stead except through my efforts? In that case they would also have to make prompt payment to me. I should like to know who said that. You must not write in general terms but name the man who said it. If you boxed the ears of such rude fellows who thus state their intentions against their lord and master, so that they felt for them with both hands, they might then realize against whom they have spoken so insolently. As to *Willem Juriaensen*, who sailed I think as a baker, make an example of him. Let *vanderdonck* bring action against him ; his time has expired long ago and make him leave the colony, for if you have no one to proceed against by way of example you will accomplish nothing. See who is with you in the council, and who is against you. If they do not help you against a man w-hose contract entirely forbids trading and whose time has expired, they are not worthy to be councilors and I would dismiss such people from the council as unworthy. You must not bind yourself so strictly by the price of the skins. When you have much merchandise you must give a little more and keep strangers out both by your authority and by outbidding them. I see your plan about the English hark. I can not say very much about it yet; experience will be the best guide in the matter: but I am surprised that the skins can be bought cheaper from some one else than in the colony. If it has been bad thus far, I hope that it will improve, but it is a good thing that you cause seawan to be used in trading. I am pleased to hear that *Sander leendersen* is an upright man, such people I am inclined to advance.

I do not want the council to change the first of January to the first of May, for the grain which is in the field on the first of May belongs to the new planting. Therefore, I do not want the ac- counts to be closed on another day than that on which the lease of the land commences, hut I have no objection to its being a little later in January. It seems that the council is inclined to change all my ordinances so as never to settle any accounts. The council must know that I appointed them and that they did not appoint me. You will ask *vanderdonck* to have the accounts settled on the day fixed by me and to have every one notified in time and to have those who fail

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to settle their accounts fined. Meanwhile, it will be all right if this time the accounts be settled on the first of May next but hereafter it must be done in January, when the animals are in the stable where they can be counted and the grain is in the barn. As [the leases of] the houses begin in May, I hope that the debit and credit accounts balanced in January will be settled then ; no stock must be taken of the animals, which they can hide then, as they run in the field. I notice that there is some trouble about this already. I am also willing that an estimate be made in January and the accounts adjusted and paid in May but the registration of animals must at all events take place in January, specifying which are with calf or colt. I am also surprised that in the inventory no mention was made of the sheep and hogs, upon which sheep *mauris jansen* has prided himself a great deal. You understand this, that when I send an ordinance or instruction they must for the time being be issued and executed as they are ; and if any change ought to be made in them, you must advise me thereof in good time, with the reasons, and await my further orders, for you and all those who represent my person must understand that I am superior to the council appointed by me and they are not my superiors. They must follow my orders and not I theirs. To let one of the councilors count the vimmen' [of grain] of a farm will not do: the farmers who are members of the council must have nothing to do with that; they are partial.

*Source: Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts, pp. 658-668.*