



Wouter Van Twiller with council members of New Amsterdam.

Chapter 1

The time was the spring of 1637 and the place was the southernmost tip of the city of New Amsterdam (the city we now know as New York). It was a day to call people out of doors, and the worthy Dutch citizens were out in force. All told, there probably was not more than five or six hundred men, women, and children living on the point of land that juts into the confluence of the twin rivers; one named for Henry Hudson, who had explored the region for the Dutch traders as early as 1609, and its neighbor, the East River.

Most of the residents were stolidly plodding across the still-dewy grass, towards the dirt parapets and stone ramparts of Fort Amsterdam. New Yorkers now recognize this as the site of the Customs House at Battery Park.

As the spectators looked on, they nodded approval of the shining breastplates and weaponry as the files of soldiers wheeled into line and halted; the drums rolled, and all eyes turned back to the fort gate. A moment of silence, and then an extraor-

dinary figure strode forth. His pompous bearing and apparel instantly stamped him as one set uniquely apart from the rest of the gathering.

The crown of his hat was higher, and its plume was more flowing than any other; the velvet of his jacket and knee breeches was glossier; the silk of his hose had a finer sheen; and the silver buckles of his shoes reflected a greater sparkle from the sun. This exalted personage was Wouter Van Twiller, Governor and Director General of New Netherlands, successor to the great Peter Minuet, who in 1621 had set an all-time record for astute real estate bargaining by buying the entire island on which New Amsterdam stands for \$24.

Mynheer Van Twiller was a weighty personage in more ways than one. He regularly ate four meals a day, with copious draughts of beer in between to give him an appetite. And as his width was greater than his height of 5 feet and 4 inches, he had been aptly described as giving the appearance of "a beer barrel on skids."

But behind the vast, flaccid expanse of his expressionless face, cushioned on its tiers of chins,