

## Trade among the Algonkians, 1630-1690

(Drew Shuptar-Rayvis 2025/26)

Europeans arrived on North American shores to an already ancient and well-established trade network that linked tribes up and down the Atlantic seaboard. However, these new people brought with them not the typical exotic materials Algonkians were used to, such as colorful feathers from the Southeast regions, seashells from coastal Florida, or shiny copper from the Great Lakes. These people brought with them colorful woolen cloth, new forms of clothing, glass beads, brass kettles and the most desired of all: iron goods. All these goods changed drastically the face of the Algonkian landscape of eastern North America and altered the trajectory of Algonkian and Haudenosaunee life forever after.

Though archaeological evidence points to small amounts of trade entering eastern North America (below modern-day Canada) as early as the late fifteenth century from intermittent European contact, most trade from that period onward and throughout much of the seventeenth century occurred aboard ship, on islands, coastlines, beaches, and in forests and villages. Established Indian trading houses would be created to conduct commerce, or “truck” with the Indians in certain locations by the second decade of the seventeenth century. Written documentation of trade or recounting trade objects doesn’t largely begin until the second decade of the seventeenth century. One of the earliest accounts is that of William Bradford and Issack De Rasier. In William Bradford’s account, one of the founders of Plymouth Colony in what is today known as Massachusetts; recounts European metallic objects he saw in native settlements upon arriving to the new world in 1620.

In Bradford’s narrative he talks of two kettles he finds while he and some men pilfer a Wampanoag family’s corn stores to feed his starving party: *“We found where a house had been, and four or five old planks laid together. Also we found a great kettle, which had been some ship’s kettle; and brought out of Europe.”* Bradford tells us of another time when he inspects the objects in an Indians home and discovers another kettle: *“In the houses we found wooden bowls, trays, and dishes, earthen pots, hand baskets made of crab shells wrought together; also an English pail or bucket; it wanted a bail, but it had two iron ears”* (1)

Even as early as 1620, coastal Algonkians are noted as having European made pots in their possession, though their use among them may be unclear. Though it is often assumed that Indigenous North Americans would use a cooking pot like any other person to prepare food, there are numerous artifacts and records which describe Native people taking kettles made of brass and copper and cutting them up to make useful objects such as arrowheads and art objects like bracelets, rolled beads and cones, earrings, and pendants. In some Native American burial sites, kettles have been found to have been used in funerary practices, being buried with individuals. Pots of European manufacture may also have been used as storage containers for seed corn, beans, or squash and buried in the ground for use in the spring.

Contrary to modern belief, not all interactions of trade were stolid or stoic: elements of humor of these early trading interactions survive. Of these accounts, we are fortunate to have the writings of eighteenth-century Moravian missionary, Johannes (John) Heckewelder (1743 – 1823, who

served as a missionary to the Western Delaware's from the mid- to late eighteenth century. In his 1818 book *History, Manners, And Customs of The Indian Nations*, he recounts a story of early trade, told to him by the western Delaware. Heckewelder claims that this account was the from first meeting with the Indians and Henry Hudson, called "the man in red" in 1609. *"The man with the red clothes returned again and distributed presents among them, consisting of beads, axes, hoes, and stockings such as the white people wear. They soon became familiar with each other and began to converse in signs. The Dutch made them understand that they would not stay here, that they would return home again, but would pay them another visit the next year, when they would bring them more presents, and stay with them awhile; but as they could not live without eating, they should want a little land of them to sow seeds, in order to raise herbs and vegetables to put into their broth. They went away as they had said, and returned in the following season, when both parties were much rejoiced to see each other; but the whites laughed at the Indians, seeing that they knew not the use of the axes and hoes they had given them the year before; for they had these hanging to their breasts as ornaments, and the stockings were made use of as tobacco pouches. The whites now put handles to the former for them, and cut trees down before their eyes, hoed up the ground, and put the stockings on their legs. Here, they say, a general laughter ensued among the Indians, that they had remained ignorant of the use of such valuable implements, and had borne the weight of such heavy metal hanging to their necks, for such a length of time."* (2)

Though trading may at times have been tense and at other times humorous, trade objects began to cause drastic affects in American Indian society. Dutch explorer and vassal of [Samuel Blommaert](#) (1583-1651), [Isaack de Rasiere \(1595-unknown\)](#) recounts in his [Letter from 1626](#) just such an observation from Mattouwac, or Long Island: *"They have a marriage custom amongst them, namely, when there is one who resolves to take a particular person for his wife, he collects a fathom or two of sewan, and comes to the nearest friends of the person whom he desires, to whom he declares his object in her presence, and if they are satisfied with him, he agrees with them how much sewan he shall give her for a bridal present. That being done, he then gives her all the Dutch beads he has, which they call Machampe and also all sorts of trinkets. If she be a young virgin, he must wait six weeks more before he can sleep with her, during which time she bewails or laments over her virginity, which they call Collatismarrenitten, All this time she sits with a blanket over her head, without wishing to look at anyone, or anyone being permitted to look at her. This period being elapsed, her bridegroom comes to her. He in the meantime has been supporting himself by hunting, and what he has taken he brings there with him; they then eat together with the friends, and sing and dance together, which they call Kintikaen. That being done, the wife must provide the food for herself and her husband, as far as breadstuffs are concerned, and she must buy what is wanting with her sewan,"*

Rassier tells us quite literally that due to Dutch trade, marriage customs as well as they way people clothe themselves drastically changes within two decades of steady Dutch contact and established trading relations. Due to this new and increased dependence on European goods, basic societal functions such as marriage could not occur or proceed without Dutch trade beads. Algonkians, therefore; were willing and active participants in whatever trade was necessary to keep the pipeline of trade goods flowing.

De Rasiere also regales of one of the most lucrative of trade goods, Duffel Cloth, a thick, coarse woven woolen cloth made in Duffel (a place in the Southern- Netherlands where they first fabricated this dense woolen cloth) and sometimes called Frieze or Dutch/Welsh rugged cloth. This cloth which is colorful but also warm and fire retardant, became a major trade object for Eastern Woodland peoples, who quickly adopted it as a winter mantle and eventually, by the late 1640's and early 1650's, utilized it to make breechcloths. De Rasiere says in his letter: "*They also use a good deal of duffel cloth, which they buy from us, and which serves for their blanket by night and their dress by day*"(3)

Three decades later, [Adriaen van Der Donck \( c.1618 – 1655\)](#), a lawyer and Schout of the Dutch West India Company who was a friend to multiple native nations and conversant in some of their languages writes in his 1655 book, [A Description of New Netherland](#): "*As covering for the upper part of the body both men and women use a sheet of duffel cloth of full width, i.e., nine and a half-quarter ells, and about three ells long. It is usually worn over the right shoulder and tied in a knot around the waist and from there hangs down to the feet. By day it serves them as a cloak, and by night as a bed and a blanket.*"

Van der Donck also tells us of the somewhat humorous recount of the use of Duffel cloth as a breech cloth for men—a narrow strip of cloth or skin (leather) that covers the front and back: "*The young males up to twelve or thirteen years of age go about quite naked; the girls generally cover their private parts as soon as they begin to walk. Around the waist they all wear a belt made of leather, whale fin, whalebone, or sewant. The men pull a length of duffel cloth-if they have it—under the belt, front and rear, and pass it between the legs. It is over half an ell wide and nine-quarter ells long, which leaves a square apron hanging down in front and at the back. It suits them well, is quite comfortable, and also airy in summer, when they often wear nothing else. It covers their nakedness and hence bears the name of Cote? [clootlap]. Before duffel cloth was common in that country, and sometimes even now when it cannot be had, they took for the purpose some dressed leather or fur, cut it like such a cloth, and made it fit. Our people everywhere refer to it by the vulgar name of clootlap , which word may appear unseemly to some in this country, but this shows that words simply have their usage, and in that country it is such that the word does not offend the ear of delicate women and maids.*" (4) The vulgarity mentioned by Van der Donck, "*Clootlap*," loosely translates as "Balls Cover." Europeans often were startled by the lack of clothing worn traditionally by Native people. From about 1620 to the end of the century, one can notice a heavy trade and predominance of European trade goods, finding their way into every facet of life.

Another helpful resource to understanding the influx of European trade goods in American Indian society during the seventeenth century is to examine land sales, purchases, and treaties where trade goods are given as payment or as a sign of good faith. When looking at trade lists—some brief and others exhaustingly long—can give us a glimpse into the "consumer diet" of Algonkian people in Southern New Netherlands and neighboring regions. Many early records that list objects (occasionally ambiguously mentioned as a "*a certain lot of merchandise, delivered to and received by them*") document small objects, usually metallic in origin. Later documents tend to be more diverse in their goods, generally because the Indians have been accustomed to trade goods and had, in a sense, developed a "refined palate." What might have sufficed a generation or two earlier, was seen as insufficient by 1657-1690.

Among these early records of trade goods, we have two records that demonstrate well this trade in “small truck,” one Dutch and one English from the Chesapeake. In James Traeger’s 2003 book, *The New York Chronology*, he cites a record given by Cornelius Meylin from 1659, recounting a much earlier purchase from 1640: “*Natives of what the colonists call Staten Island sell their land for "kittles, axes, Hoos, wampum drilling awles, Jews Harps, and diverse small wares", according to an undated translation of recollections by Cornelius Meylin, the island's patroon, that will be recorded in 1659.*” (5)

Another remarkably similar record is an English record from Indian trader Henry Fleet, who lived among the Yaocomico in Southern Maryland in the 1630’s and served as Leonard Calvert’s guide and de facto Indian Interpreter when he settles Maryland in 1632. In Willard Mumford’s 2002 book *Barter, Bits, Bills and Tobacco, The Story of Money in Early Maryland*, he writes: “*For explorer and trader Captain Henry Fleet and early settlers on the Chesapeake, barter was the initial system of exchange. Although they did not find gold or similar treasure, the colonists discovered that trade in beaver and other animal skins was a lucrative alternative. Food, mainly corn, was also a chief trade commodity. Captain Fleet found that the natives especially liked European clothes at one point, he noted that his crew had succeeded in trading all of their clothes for beaver skins. Actually, Native Americans sought gunpowder shot, guns axes, hoes, knives, combs, fish hooks, Jew's harps, look-ing glasses, and just about any manufactured item that the English were willing to trade. Con-sequently, Maryland's founding fathers brought trunks filled with trade goods to barter with the Native Americans. Leonard Calvert, the colony's first governor, bought the land for St. Mary's City with "Axes, hatchets, rakes, and several yards of cloth." Lord Baltimore's investment in goods to trade with the Native Americans proved to be a good one and paved the way for the success of his settlement. Trade goods or truck, kept the first colonists supplied with corn and other commodities until they could get their own crops in the ground and reap a harvest*” (6)

In both accounts, though from two different colonies and two different ethnicities of European groups, during the same period of the 1630’s and 1640’s the same trade goods are being asked for, particularly the musical instrument known as “Jews harps” or “jaw harps.” Small metallic goods along with glass beads, were cheap to produce and import from a European economic standpoint. They were made and imported in huge quantities and sold for a decent profit to Indigenous North Americans. Though a monetary investment, this trade proved economically lucrative in this period.

However, by the mid -to late seventeenth century, the list of trade goods become far more complex and incredibly diverse, often including notes about their quality and place of manufacture. Indian buyers by mid-century were no longer pleased with a handful of small metallic goods and increasingly demanded more expensive and diverse, varied items, such as European clothing, firearms and of course but sadly, quantities of alcohol.

Three records illustrate this change particularly well. Again, these records are both Dutch and English. One of the best examples from the southern New Netherlands is the 1657 Indian deed to Lubbertus Van Dincklage for the land of Staten Island. It is signed by multiple chiefs who drew images of themselves and provides a lengthy list of trade goods they received, which are

described as follows: “*We, the undersigned natives of North America, hereditary owners of Staten Island, Sackis of Tappaan, Taghkoppeauw of Tappaan, Temeren of Gweghkongh, Mattenou of Hespatingh, Waerhinnis Couwee of Hespatingh, Weertsjan of Hackingsack, Kekinghamme of Hackinchsack, Wewetackenne of Hackingsack, Neckthaa of Hackingsack, Minquasackyn of Hweghkongh, Terincks of Hweghkongh, Mikanis of Gweghkongh, Mintames Seevio of Gweghkongh, Acchipior of Hweghkongh, certify and declare for ourselves and our descendants in presence and with the knowledge of the underwritten witnesses, to have sold and conveyed as a free hereditary property now and forever without any further claims to be made by us or our descendants to Lubbertus van Dincklaecken, attorney for his right honorable Henrick van der Capellen tho Rijssel, the whole of Staten Island, by us called Eghquaons, for the goods hereafter specified, to be brought from Holland and delivered to us, the owners. 10 boxes of shirts; 10 ells of red checked cloth; 30 pounds of powder; 30 pairs of Faroese stockings; 2 pieces of duffel; some awls; 10 muskets; 30 kettles, large and small; 25 adzes; 10 bars of lead; 50 axes, large and small; some knives.*” (7)

Later English records from New England and New York show similar elaborate payments for purchases: New Englanders in Norwalk, Connecticut, purchasing Runkeage Island; Englishman purchasing the town of Fishkill, NY from the Wappinger Tribes in 1683; and William Penn’s 1685 purchases from the Unami speaking peoples.

In 1651, Englishman living in Norwalk Connecticut, made a purchase from local and Long Island Sachems. Their payments included clothing, fathoms of Indian made or European manufactured wampum, European made tobacco pipes, and various metallic goods. All indicate expensive wares, showing that Native Americans would not settle for any less: “*Deed from Rinkingheage. This Indenture made the 15th of February 1651, Between Rinkingheage, Piamikin, and Magise, and Town Tom, and Winnapuke, and Magushetowes, and Concuskenew, and Wampasum, and Sasseakun, and Runckenunnett, and Pokessake, and Shoake-Cum, and Soanamatu, and Prodax, and Matumpun, and CockeNoe-DE-Long-Island, Indians, of the one Partie, and Richard Webb, Nathaniel Eli, Matthewe Marven, senr., Nathaniel Richard's, Isacke More, Thomas Fitch, Thomas Hales, Richard Holmsted, Richard Seamer, Ralph Keeler, Matthew Marven, junior, Nathaniel Haies, Edward Church, Joseph Fitch, Planters of Norwake, for the use and behalfe of said Town, WINESSET, that the said Runekinheage, and Piamikin, (&c. &e.) \*\*\*\*\* Have, and in and for the consideration of Thirtie Fathom of Wampum, Tenn Kettles, Fifteen Coates, Tenn payr of Stockings, Tenn Knifes, Tenn Hookes, Iwenty Pipes, Tenn Muckes, Tenn needles, to them in hand paid, Have, and Every of them, for themselves and their hevers, Granted, Bargained, Sold, assigned, Enteoﬀed, and confirmed; and by these Presents doth Bargain, Grant, Sell, enteolfe, assigne, set over and confirme, unto the said Richard Webb*” (8)

Thirty years later, in 1683 New Netherland another very similar purchase was made. This purchase, today known as the [Rombout Patent](#) was conducted by Gulian Verplanck (1698–1751) and Francis Rombout (1631–1691) with a vast number of Munsee speaking sachems and orators present. This purchase was said to have been made with the Wappinger people and their representatives involving the land that would later become Fishkill, New York. Their payment for this vast tract of land, is as follows:

*"A Schedull or Peticular of Money, Wampum and other goods Paid by francis Rumbout and Gulyne Ver Planke for the purchase of the Land in the Deed here- unto annexed  
"One hund Royalls, One hund Pound Powder, Two hund fathom of White Wampum, one hund Barrs of Lead., One hundred fathom of Black Wampum, thirty tobacco boxes ten holl adges, thirty Gunns, twenty blankets, forty fathom of Duffils, twenty fathom of stroudwater Cloth, thirty Kittles, forty Hatchets, forty Hornes, forty Shirts, forts p stockins, twelve coates of R. B. & b. C., ten Drawing Knives, forty earthen Juges, forty Bottles, forty Knives, fouer ankers rum, ten halfe fatts Beere, Two hund tobacco Pipes &c, Eighty Pound Tobacco."New York, August the 8th, 1683. The shore Peticulers were Delivered to the Indians in the Bill of Sale Men-oned in the presence of us, Antho. Brockhalls. P. V. Courtlandt, John West. - I do hearby certify the foregoing to be a true Copy of the Original Record, compared therewith by me." [Lewis A. Scott, Secretary.](#) (9)*

A final English example dates back to the mid 1680's and involves that most honorable Quaker, [William Penn \(1644–1718\)](#). On September 22, 1685, Penn desires to purchase land from Unami speaking people. He wants to acquire: "*all their land "between Upland and Oppoqueenamy as far back as they have any right theirto.*" The bounds of this land bordered the Brandywine River and the sale covered an enormous tract of land extending over thousands of acres: "*the territory from Quing Quingus called Duck Creek unto Upland called Chester Creek all along the West Side of Delaware River and so between said Creeks backwards as far as a man can ride in two days with a horse.*" The final payment amount given by Penn to Unami speaking sachems and their representatives is clearly listed:

*"Following is a complete inventory of the merchandise given to the sachems in payment for the land:*

*20 guns  
20 blankets  
100 bars lead  
40 Pairs Stockings  
100 Fathoms Wampum  
100 awl blades  
20 tobacco tongs  
30 pairs scissors  
200 needles  
5 gallons molasses  
100 Jews harps  
30 Wooden screw borers  
20 fathoms Matchcoats  
20 kettles  
40 tomahawks  
1 barrel of beer  
30 lbs. Sugar  
30 glass bottles  
300 tobacco pipes  
20 steels  
30 combs*

1 skiple salt  
20 tobacco boxes  
20 hoes  
100 strings beads  
20 fathoms Stroudwater  
20 lbs. powder  
100 knives  
20 lbs. red lead -  
30 pewter spoons  
100 hands of tobacco  
300 flints  
60 looking glasses  
30 gimlets

Weslager, in *Redmen on the Brandywine* writes that looking back today, this assortment of oddities may seem like a paltry price for thousands of acres now worth many millions of dollars. Actually, Penn furnished these goods at his own expense, and, as we have seen, he was not obligated to pay the Indians anything had he so chosen. We must not forget that he already held clear title to the land. From the Native viewpoint the goods represented a small fortune.” (10)

Though possibly a novelty at first, Algonquian peoples in Southern New Netherland and neighboring regions within two generations became almost entirely dependent on trade goods. Societies that once strived to live in balance with the natural world were now willing to trap, hunt and skin as many fur bearing animals as possible to keep the pipeline of trade goods coming in order to perform basic societal functions, and even to cloth themselves. Other tribes farther north, acquiring those trade goods earlier than their rivals, now gave them the fuel to expand their military and cultural dominance. Willing to usurp, dominate, and make war with other tribes to ensure the pipelines of trade soon was securely in their hands. This dependence on trade goods gradually diminished the autonomy of tribal nations and made them increasingly dependent on European merchants and their economic whims. While there is much to learn from these ledgers—adding color and texture to life in this period and challenging stereotypes of stone, bone, wood, and shell—they also offer a glimpse into the beginning of the erosion of tribal autonomy and independence.

1. Ronald Dale Karr. *Indian New England 1524-1674, A Compendium of Eyewitness Accounts of Native American Life* (Branch Line Press 1999), page 69
2. John Heckwelder. *History, Manners and Customs of The Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and Neighboring States* (Ayer Company Publishers 2005), page 74
3. Isaack de Rasiere, Letters to Samuel Blommaert, 1626-28, page 3.
4. Adriaen van der Donck, *A Description of New Netherland* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), pages 79-80, “*Of the Dress and Ornaments of Men and Women.*”

5. James Trager, *The New York Chronology, The Ultimate Compendium of Events, People, and Anecdotes from the Dutch to the Present* (Harper Collins 2003), page 3
6. Willard R. Mumford. *Barter, Bits, Bills, and Tobacco, The Story of Money in Early Maryland*” (The Maryland State Archives - The Maryland Historical Trust, 2002), pages 3-4.
7. New Amsterdam History Center, *Mapping Early New York, Encyclopedia,*” Indian Deed for Staten Island, 1657.
8. Edwin Hall, *The Ancient Historical Records Norwalk CT., with a Plan of the Ancient Settlement, and of the Town in 1847. Compiled by Edwin Hall, Pastor of the First Congregational Church, 1847,* pages 35-36.
9. Frank Hasbrouck. *History of Dutchess County New York, Indian Deeds, Land Patents* (Cornell University Library,1909), page 37.
10. C.A. Weslager, *Redmen on the Brandywin* (Hambleton Company Inc, 1953), pages 54-55.

