

# **PETER OF NEW AMSTERDAM**



**PETER OF NEW  
AMSTERDAM**

**A STORY OF OLD NEW YORK**

**BY**

**JAMES OTIS**

**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS**

**CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA**

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## FOREWORD

The purpose of this series of stories is to show the children, and even those who have already taken up the study of history, the *home life* of the colonists with whom they meet in their books. To this end every effort has been made to avoid anything savoring of romance, and to deal only with facts, so far as that is possible, while describing the daily life of those people who conquered the wilderness whether for conscience sake or for gain.

That the stories may appeal more directly to the children, they are told from the viewpoint of a child, and purport to have been related by a child. Should any criticism be made regarding the seeming neglect to mention important historical facts, the answer would be that these books are not sent out as histories,—although it is believed that they will awaken a desire to learn more of the building of the nation,—and only such incidents as would be particularly noted by a child are used.

Surely it is entertaining as well as instructive for young people to read of the toil and privations in the homes of those who came into a new world to build up a country for themselves, and such homely facts are not to be found in the real histories of our land.

JAMES OTIS.



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# **Peter of New Amsterdam**

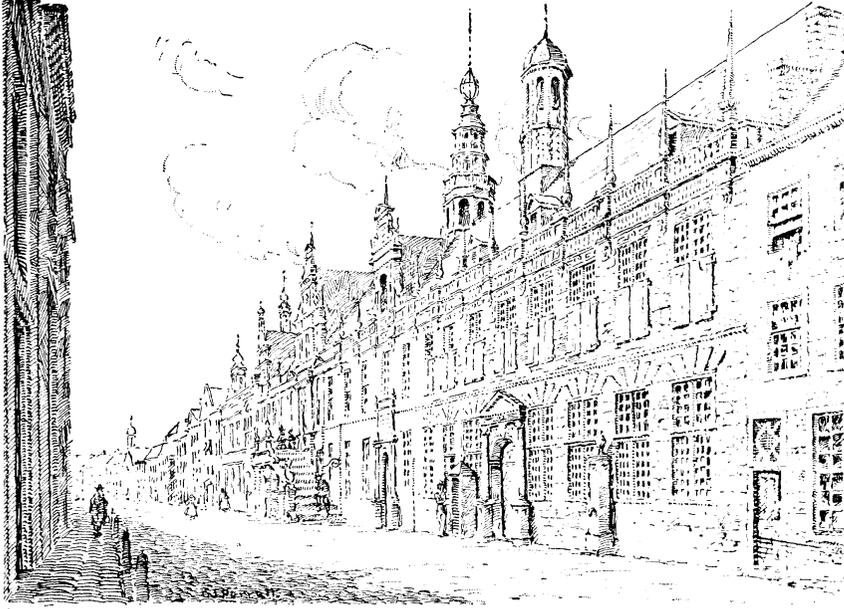
## **WHERE I WAS BORN**

If I ever attempted to set down a story in words, it would be concerning the time when I was much the same as a slave among the Dutch of New Amsterdam, meaning a certain part of the world in that America where so many of my father's countrymen came after they left England, because of the King's not allowing them to worship God in the way they believed to be right.

It sounds odd to say that an English boy was ever held as slave by the Dutch, and perhaps I have no right to make such statement, because it is not strictly true, although there were many years in my life when I did the same work, and received the same fare, as did the negroes in the early days of New Amsterdam.

Before I was born, my father was clerk to the postmaster of Scrooby, one William Brewster, and perhaps thus it was that when, because of troubles concerning religion, Master Brewster journeyed to

Leyden with a company of people who were called Separatists, my parents went with him.



And so it was that I was born in Leyden, in the year of our Lord, 1612, but I never knew what it was to have a mother, for mine died while I was yet in the cradle; thanks to the care of a loving, God-fearing father, however, I could do very much toward looking out for myself by the time I had come to the age of eight, when I was left entirely alone in the world. I love now to think that during the years of my life while the good man remained on this earth, I did not cause him any great anxiety, and required little care.

Within two months after my father died, which was in the year 1620, many of the congregation in Leyden set off with Master Brewster for the New World, there to build up a city where men might worship God in whatsoever fashion they pleased.

Those of the Separatists who were left behind, cared for me as best they might until a year had passed; but none of them were overly burdened with this world's goods, and, young though I was, I realized, in some slight degree, what a tax the care of a lad nine years old was upon them.

## ALONE IN HOLLAND

Later, those who had in charity taken charge of me also set off to join Master Brewster's company in America, and I, an English boy, was left much the same as alone in Holland. I could speak the Dutch language, however, and was willing to work at whatever came to hand, so that I earned enough with which to provide me with food;



as for clothing, I wore the cast-off garments of the Dutch boys, whose mothers, taking pity upon an orphan, freely gave them to me.

Among the few English then left in Leyden was Master Jan Marais, a professor in the University, whom my father had known; and he, so far as lay in his power, kept a watchful eye over me; but this was only to the extent of inquiring for my welfare when we met by chance, or in recalling my name to those among his Dutch friends who were in need of such services as so young a lad could render.



Now it seems, although I knew nothing concerning it at the time, that there had been formed in

Holland, among the merchants, what was known as the West India Company, whose purpose was to make a settlement in that part of the New World which they had named New Netherland, claiming to own it, and there trade with the savages, or engage in whatsoever of business would bring in money.

Master Peter Minuit—whom I should call Heer Minuit, because such is the Dutch term for master, but the odd-sounding title never did ring true in my ear—had been appointed by this company, which had already sent out some people to the world of America, Director of the settlement that was to be made. He came on a visit of leave-taking to Master Jan Marais, and it so chanced, whether for good or for evil, that while the two were walking in the streets of Leyden, they came upon me, standing idly in front of a cook-shop, and saying to myself that if the choice were given to me I would take this or that dainty to eat.

## **AN IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION**

It may have been in a spirit of fun, or that perhaps Master Marais had in mind to do me a good turn, but however it came about, he said as gravely as if I were the burgomaster's son:

“Heer Peter Minuit, allow me to present to you Master Peter Hulbert, who has had the misfortune to lose both his father and his mother by death.”

Master Minit was not unlike many others whom I had met, save that there was in his face a certain look which bespoke a kindly heart, or so it seemed, while he gazed at me much as he would at a young calf that he had in mind to purchase.

I never did lay claim to being comely, either as boy or man; but yet it must have been that this sturdy visitor saw something about me which attracted either his closest attention or his charity, for he said with a kindly smile, as he patted me on the head:

“Well, namesake Peter, since nearly all your English friends have gone to America, what say you to voyaging in the same direction?”



I failed to understand the meaning of the question, and probably stood staring at him like a simple; yet at the same time I noted a quick glance from Master Marais, as if the Director had said something which caught his attention. An instant later, he said with more of seriousness in his voice than seemed to me the matter warranted:

“It may not be well, Heer Minuit, to put into the lad’s head a desire that cannot be gratified.”

“And why may it not be?” Master Minuit asked, wheeling sharply about. “If namesake Peter has no friends in Holland who can take charge of him, why may he not go to that land on the other side of the world with me? A youngster of ten years might find many a meaner post than that of body servant to the Director of the new town in America.”

## I GO MY WAY

Whatever speech these two may have had together afterward, I know not; but certain it is that Master Marais, speaking to me hastily, as if it were not well I should hear what passed between him and his friend, directed that I go my way until nightfall, when I was to come into the University grounds with the intent of seeing him.

It was all very well to tell me to go my way; but I had none. One section of Leyden was the same as another to me, who was penniless and hungry, casting about in the hope of earning as much, by whatsoever employment came my way, as would buy what might serve for supper.

However, I was not so dull as to fail in understanding that Master Marais would have me out of his path for a time, and I went off rapidly, as though busi-

ness in Leyden would come to a standstill if I did not make haste.



Then, once out of sight of these two, I looked about, keeping my eyes wide open in the hope of seeing one who required my services, but failing utterly, so that when night came, hunger had such a hold upon my stomach that I was like to have begged from whosoever passed me on the street.

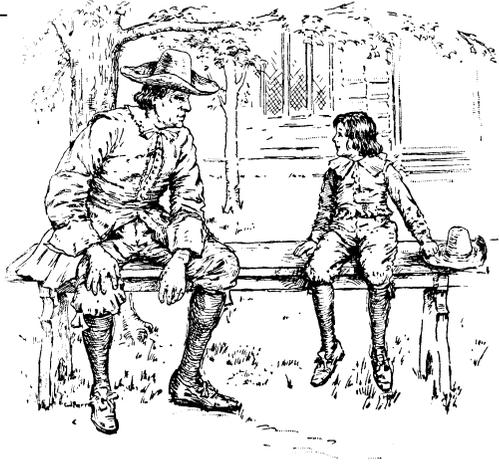
Had I done so, it would have been the first time in my life, and since that afternoon I have had no reason to ask in charity aught of any one, for surely have I earned double that which I have ever received.

## THE BARGAIN

Now lest you think I am given to using too many words, it is enough if I say that at the appointed

time I met Master Marais at the University, and there learned from him that Master Peter Minuit had offered to take me as servant to that place in America which was called New Netherland, pledging himself, in due time, to set me on a path which would lead to honest manhood. He agreed to provide me with such an outfit as would be needed, and to bear the charge of my living while we remained in Holland.

Master Marais, after first stating that it was for me to decide, since my future, perhaps, depended upon the answer to be given Master Minuit, advised that I accept gratefully the Director's offer.



And so I did. What other could a lad, who had neither father nor mother, say, when he was given a chance to earn honestly that which he needed for the care of his body?

To me, boy as I was, the long voyage overseas had no terrors; but was rather an inducement, for I would see strange sights before coming to the New World, and then who should say that I might not, one day, rise to be as great a man as was Master Minuit?

Master Marais told me I had decided well, when I said that I believed myself fortunate in having such an opportunity, and straightway took charge of my affairs, having been so instructed by my new master. I was given of clothing more than ever I had before, and fed until I was no longer hungry, during such time as I remained in Leyden.

Then came the day when Master Marais sent me to Amsterdam with a letter to Master Minuit's agent, and from that hour I was no more than any parcel of goods, which the West India Company counted to send into the New World.

It troubled me little, however, that I was considered of no importance, for in exactly that light did I look upon myself; yet I could not but wonder, if so be I was servant to the Director of the new country in America, that no one told me to do this or do that, but left me to my own will, save that I was ordered to keep strictly the rules laid down by the mistress of the house in which I lodged, until such time as the *Sea Mew* was ready to set sail.

Then it was that one of the sailors came to my lodgings to summon me, and I know not how it was he chanced to learn of my whereabouts, for I had had speech concerning my affairs with no person in Amsterdam, although it may well be that Master Marais had sent information concerning what was to be done with me.

## SAILING FOR THE NEW WORLD

It was in January, in the year of our Lord 1626, when the *Sea Mew* set forth on her long voyage, and during a certain number of days after we left port, it seemed as if my end was near at hand. There are those who make light of the sickness of the sea; but I am not one, for verily my sufferings on board the *Sea Mew* passed man's power of description.

I saw Master Minuit when I first went on board; but it was as if a cat had been looking at a king, for he remained in the after part of the ship where were the people of quality, while I, only a servant, was herded among the sailors, well up in the bow, where kicks and cuffs were the rule, and blessings the exception.

The life of a boy at sea, whether he be a servant in the employ of some passenger, or belonging to the ship's company, is at its best truly pitiable. No one has a good word for him; strive as he may, he is always in some person's road, and the end of a wet rope is ever ready to the hand of that person who, having lost his temper, would vent his spite upon the most helpless being near at hand, which is the boy.

I had counted on seeing much of the world during this voyage in the *Sea Mew*, believing that we should visit strange lands, where I could roam about feasting my eyes upon all manner of odd things; but none of this came to pass.



Twice during the voyage did the *Sea Mew* cast anchor off some island, where it would have given me no little pleasure to go on shore that I might compare the land with the country I had known; but I lacked the courage to ask permission of my master, who as yet

had not spoken to me since the ship left port, and no one, not even the friendliest among the seamen, had enough of charity in his heart to say "Come."

## A VIEW OF NEW NETHERLAND

Because of all this, the voyage, which took up nearly four months, was one of discomfort, if not exactly of suffering, and when we came to anchor off that place in America which had been named New Netherland, I would have rejoiced even though it were the most desolate island, because of my life on ship-board having, for a time at least, come to an end.

But before I tell you what I saw when I gazed upon this part of the New World for the first time, to the end that you may the better understand what I am talking about, let me say that toward the close of the year of grace, 1624, a company of forty-five persons, men, women and children, with all their home belongings, their tools for the farms, and one hundred and three cows and sheep, had been sent out from Amsterdam in three large ships and a small boat, called by the Dutch a yacht, although in England it would have been spoken of as a pinnace.

Some of these people, who agreed with the West India Company to build at this place a trading post, had already set up such houses as would serve to shelter them from the weather.



And this is the picture which I saw on the fourth day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1626, when I stood on the forward part of the *Sea Mew*, gazing shoreward with hungry eyes, for the one desire I had was to plant my feet once more upon the solid earth.

We were lying where two grand rivers came together, forming a harbor in which all the King's ships might ride in safety. In front of me was a range of small hills, whereon grew noble trees that had just put on their dress of green to mark the coming of the summer, and in the valleys, betwixt the forest and the shore, were small dwellings or huts built of the bark of trees, much as a child might make a house of twigs.

Beyond these huts were settlements like unto nothing I had ever seen, made up of buildings which looked not unlike gigantic logs that had been split in the middle, with the cleft side lying on the ground. Some of these half-round shelters were exceedingly long, others short, and all had one or more doors close to the ground, but no windows that I could see.

They were made, as I afterward learned, of the bark of birch trees laid over a framework of saplings, and fastened in place with the sinews of animals, or with small wooden pegs. From more than one of them came smoke, telling of fires and of cooking, but I saw no chimneys.

## THE “BROWN MEN” OR SAVAGES

Here and there, either in this odd village, or near the bark huts of the Dutch people, wandered colored men, not black like those negro slaves we had on board the *Sea Men*, but rather the color of a copper kettle that has been somewhat used over a fire. For clothing, they wore nothing more than a piece of skin tied around the waist, or leggings of hide.

Their heads were bare, with the hair shaven from off a goodly portion, leaving a long tuft directly on the top, which by means, as I afterward learned, of animal fat, was made to stand upright like a horn.

These were the savages, and I looked no longer at the dwellings built in the shape of a half-moon, or at the loosely stacked strips of bark which marked the home of some Dutchman who had come here at the bidding of the West India Company, for all my thoughts were centered upon these brown men, of whom I had heard as one hears a fairy tale, not believing in its truth.

Now although the land was goodly and fair to look upon, a veritable garden of pleasure, to those who had come from a long voyage on the angry waters, as had we of the *Sea Men*, yet there came into my mind the fear that these brown men who wandered here and there, giving little heed to us who were so lately arrived, and who were the owners of this New World,

might come at some future time to say to themselves that it were better the Dutch had never landed in their midst. If that day ever did arrive, woe unto us whose skins were white!

Little did I believe, even as I dreamed, that such would come to be the truth; that the day was not far distant when these savages who made even of their hair a seeming weapon, would come to thirst for the blood of us who hoped to find fame or fortune, or both, in this New World of America.

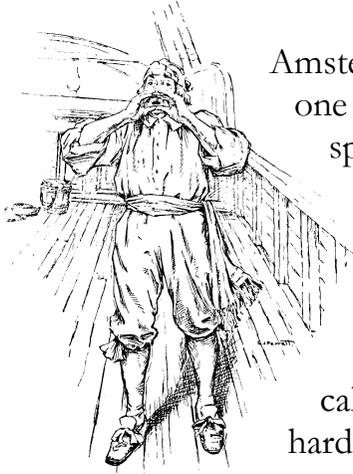
At a mile or more from the point where we had anchored, we were told there was a strip of marshy ground, stretching across from river to river, and lying so low that when the tide was at its height, the streams were united, making of this settlement an island, which the Indians called Manhattan.

There were trees in the forest before me enough to make all the masts that could be used by the people of the world, and in such a wilderness how abundant must be the game! In these huge rivers how great in number the fish!

I panted to leave the narrow space of ship; to go on shore where I could wander among the trees and amid the flowers; where I could see these strange, brown people, whose huts were to me much like hills thrown up by ants; to come in contact with all these things which God had made, and in so doing rejoice that I lived.

## SUMMONED TO THE CABIN

Now it was as if Master Minuit, who had given no heed during all the voyage as to whether I might be alive or dead, suddenly remembered that somewhere on board the *Sea Mew* he had a servant by the name of Peter Hulbert, and straightway sent one of the serving men from the great cabin to hunt me out.



From the time of leaving Amsterdam, until this moment, no one had shown any desire to have speech with me, while all had acted as if believing I was of no more use in this world than to cumber their path; thus it came near to startling me when my name was called, so that I hung back, hardly knowing if I was expected to go forward or aft, until one of the seamen, hearing the serving man vainly shouting, asked me if that was not my name which was being spoken so loudly.

Whereupon I awoke to my senses, and went toward the stern to meet this fellow, who was bawling at the full strength of his lungs, as if he would make his tongue do the work of a trumpet, and by him was led into the great cabin where stood my master, as if he had been awaiting my coming.



From that moment until this I have never sought for employment; there has ever been something which I should do for others, or was in duty bound to do for myself, until I am come to think that he who goes into a new world to help in building there a city, much the same as fastens himself into a treadmill in such a fashion that he may not contrive his own escape.

Now did I learn what it meant to act the part of body servant to such as Master Minuit, and was not a little surprised at finding that he had two others, one a man grown, and a second who was three or four years my elder, both of whom took advantage of every opportunity to lord it over me when the master was not within hearing.