



0. Gangs of New York - Story Preface

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1827 Oil painting, by George Catlin, depicting the Five Points neighborhood of New York City in the 19th century. Image online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

*From every corner,
as you glance about you in these dark retreats,
some figure crawls half-awakened...
Where dogs would howl to lie,
women, and men, and boys
slink off to sleep,
forcing the dislodged rats to move away
in quest of better lodgings.*

Charles Dickens' Observations
about New York City's "Five Points" Neighborhood
in *American Notes* 1842

Two centuries before Charles Dickens visited Manhattan, the island was the center of a Dutch colony known as New Netherland.

In 1626, Peter Minuit (the colony's first director general) "bought" the land - about twenty thousand acres - from Native Americans. The price was sixty guilders' worth of trading items (the equivalent of \$24).

At the time, Manhattan provided the Dutch colonists with a pastoral setting, suitable for farming and pasturing. It also gave them a more secure location - in a fort - where they could band together against common enemies.

The Dutch colonists called their farms "bouweries." By the 1650s, about a thousand Dutch colonists lived on Manhattan Island.

In 1664, King Charles II claimed New Netherland as *Britain's* territory. As the story goes, the only person who resisted the idea was the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, since the colonists thought they would have more freedom under British rule.

With the loss of Dutch control, Manhattan's town of New Amsterdam became the city of New York. Over the years, pastoral settings gave way to urban sprawl.

Then ... came the Gangs of New York.

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Gangs-of-New-York>

Media Stream



Portrait of Charles Dickens

Image, described above, online courtesy Portrait Gallery at Perry Casteñada Library, University of Texas at Austin.

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Gangs of New York

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Peter Minuit - Purchase of Manhattan Island

Clip - from Episode 1 of "The New York Connection," a Dutch public-television series - online, courtesy idtvdocs' channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Peter-Minuit-Purchase-of-Manhattan-Island>