



Did Peter Minuit, acting on behalf of the Dutch West India Company, actually purchase Manhattan Island from the Lenape for the total sum of 60 guilders?

No purchase contract survives—and it is likely that no such contract ever existed. There is, however, some written evidence that at least the Dutch believed that an actual meeting of the minds, between buyer and seller, had occurred.

This image depicts a document written in 1626, about six months (or so) after Minuit apparently made his deal with the Lenape. Owned and maintained by the Dutch national archives, in The Hague, the letter states that it was received, in The Netherlands, on the 7th of November, 1626.

The letter was written by Peter Schaghen (the liaison between the Dutch government and the Dutch West India Company). Hereafter is the English translation of the Dutch-language document (split into paragraphs for easier reading):

Rcvd. 7 November 1626

High and Mighty Lords,

Yesterday the ship the Arms of Amsterdam arrived here. It sailed from New Netherland out of the River Mauritius on the 23d of September. They report that our people are in good spirit and live in peace. The women also have borne some children there.

They have purchased the Island Manhattes from the Indians for the value of 60 guilders. It is 11,000 morgens in size [about 22,000 acres]. They had all their grain sowed by the middle of May, and reaped by the middle of August They sent samples of these summer grains: wheat, rye, barley, oats, buckwheat, canary seed, beans and flax.

The cargo of the aforesaid ship is:

*7246 Beaver skins
178½ Otter skins
675 Otter skins
48 Mink skins
36 Lynx skins
33 Minks
34 Muskrat skins*

Many oak timbers and nut wood. Herewith, High and Mighty Lords, be commended to the mercy of the Almighty,

In Amsterdam, the 5th of November anno 1626.

Your High and Mightinesses' obedient, P. Schaghen

The letter is the first-known reference to the purchase of Manhattan for the sum of 60 guilders,

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image online via a Dutch-language website.

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