

Religious Freedom? Equality? Human Rights? Separation of Church and State? – Poppycock!!!

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM?

"Roger Williams is hereby banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony" (for speaking against punishing religious dissension.)
General Court of Massachusetts.

October 9, 1635

EQUALITY?

"Gentlemen leaders supervise and direct the labor of the lower classes and do not trouble themselves to perform such labors."

John Ratcliffe, Jamestown
prior to The Starving Times

HUMAN RIGHTS?

All "Negroes or other slaves," (freed or not) whether already in the Province, or to be importated later, were to serve "Durante Vita"... "dive(r)s freeborne English women" who, "forgetfull of their free Condiçion and to the disgrace of our Nation", married (negroes) shall serve their husband's masters.

Maryland Legislature, 1664

"Each Colony required voters to have a "stake in Society" by owning land, property, or paying a certain amount of taxes."
Williamsburg

"That the future shall learn from the past"

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

All ministers shall...function according to the ecclesiastical laws and orders of the Church of England...subject to the censure of the Governor and Council of Estate.

Virginia House of Burgesses 1619

Among the references: *The Island at the Center of the World—The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America* by Russell Shorto.

INTRODUCTION: Our 2012 membership survey reinforced that our members treasure the variety of topics presented here requesting "current views, science, religion, talks with 'meat' to them as well as spiritual stuff". Every Sunday we hope to hear new words, wish to learn something, be challenged, gain some "take home". The recent political rancor over freedom, equality, human rights, separation of church and state, etc. ran the gamut of what kind of person you can or can not marry, what kind of cars you can buy, the "whethers or nots" of pregnancy, how much money you can earn and how much you

must give to others, what you can own, what country in the world certain people must live in...or not, what energy source you should use, what insurance you must buy, which kind of gun you can own if any gun at all, and even what one can say in church without the church having to give part of its donations to the government. Freedom, equality, human rights, Separation of Church and State. These American principles are attributed to our "Founding Fathers" but with a variety of interpretations as to what each means. However, the real roots of these concepts that we UU's champion and our nation so protects with blood and treasure existed in no English colony in America suggesting that a piece might be missing from the history of our country. And knowing history makes a difference.

In 1944, Irene Morgan was dragged off a Greyhound bus by the Middlesex County Sheriff, R.B. Segar, right here in our church community, across the river in Saluda, for sitting only where white people were to sit. Two years later, in Morgan vs. the Commonwealth of Virginia, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed such state segregation laws for interstate traffic, an early step in changing civil rights history. Irene knew her history, possibly through her Seventh Day Adventist faith, and acted upon it. Without sound knowledge and accurate background, it is hard for us think productively about these varied perspectives on what those important freedoms mean and how they should be protected. We thought we knew our country's evolution of this sense of freedom, something about its depth, its breadth, and its foundation as well as the connotations on which those principals are based. A brand new source may be changing that.

Main Talk: "Our Founding Fathers" is a phrase which typically includes Ben Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton in partnership with a sizeable handful of others. In general, history has given this team the credit for much of what we loosely label the key elements of our country's focus upon and structure to protect our human rights. We UU's are big on this stuff. It is nested in our UU

principles, "...justice, equity...the right of conscience....". It is nested in our country's Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal". It is prominent in our Bill of Rights, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." We UU's play a disproportionate part in promoting and protecting these concepts, debating their aspects, and joining organizations dedicated to these principles. It is an unfinished business we are engaged in. It is of value to know its roots.

Where did this revolutionary way of thinking come from? Historians have previously attributed the roots of these concepts to our Founding Fathers readings of the great reformers' and philosophers' books such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, with a bit of England's King James actions thrown in as well as the undercurrents in France at the time. Of course, their dissatisfaction with the state of British tradition and attempts to control the colonies played an obvious part. However, some recent research and revelations seem to influence that historical perspective as to the source of this movement toward emphasis on human rights that seemed to infect certain settlements of the new world and spread like a virus throughout the original 13 colonies that made up these yet to be united states. And we owe this revision in historical perspective to one man, Charles Gehring. But more on him later.

Think with me for the moment about the status of civil rights in the colonies beginning with religion. In New England, we had the pilgrims / Puritans so rigidly focused upon their one true

religious interpretation that they ran those the least bit in variance out of the colony, Roger Williams for one who established Rhode Island with his variety of Puritanism. The lucky like Williams were banished. Some were judged by the judicial authorities of the theocracy, hanged, their bodies stripped naked and dragged through the streets. Thomas Hooker was another Puritan that fled and then led the church-state exclusiveness into Connecticut expanding the theocratic governments of New England. Less than 100 years before the Declaration of Independence, the Puritans arrested around 200 witches, hanging 19 and pressing one collaborator to death with rocks. Two dogs were killed as being assistant witches. The Puritans passed down many characteristics to the nation. They were practical, plain-spoken, businesslike, pious—all traits that Americans from Adams on admired and tried to emulate. Subsequently the Puritans have fallen out of favor as also being seen as self-important zealots. This Puritan conviction of exceptionalism lives on today that historians believe traceable to Cotton Mather, Jeremy Belknap, and others who put their religious beliefs into print. Pennsylvania was tied to the Quakers and Maryland to the Catholics but other religions reluctantly allowed rather than excluded. In the southern colonies, the Church of England dominated with their clergy forced to swear allegiance to the King of England thus more formally tying church and state together. In later years religious plurality gained in all the colonies with tolerance rather than recognition and independence being the theme. Laws continued selecting who could participate in governing and who could not, who could marry whom and who could not, who could own whom and who could not, and who could assemble with whom and who could not, and who could seek redress from the government and courts and who could not. Religious Freedom, Equality, Human Rights, Separation of Church and

State? Poppycock!!! Not really a sound foundation of what our country was to become only a few decades later...to become at least in theory and in print.

However, there was one entity, one colony, one group of people that was separate from all the rest and was completely different in respect to these issues that we UU's hold sacred, if "sacred" is the proper word. In this colony, there were no guilds, the labor unions of the time, that held sway as in Europe, thus a baker was free to own land, invest in a shipment of tobacco, and earn a bit of extra income as a soldier. Young men who entered this colony as humble artisans rose to heights unimaginable among the stratified English elite. A muscular strain of American upward mobility was born. Contrast that to Virginia where the Jamestown elite nearly all died out in the first few years as those elite saw themselves as those who should tell others what to do rather than be doers themselves. In the local language of the colony of today's talk, the word for master was "baas" spelled B-A-A-S, a word that came into common usage to distinguish itself from the power system that held sway in the English-speaking mind. The word said we have no class system here, but someone is in charge. "I'm not your master, lord, or sovereign, but I am your boss. Now let's get to work."

Other words crept into our future. Small cakes spelled Koeckjes and pronounced "cook-yehs" became cookies. A chopped cabbage slathered with vinegar and melted butter called Kool Sla with a "K", cabbage salad, became cole slaw. And the presence of St. Nicholas bearing presents for the children every year in early December became unbearable to the children next door who might have been of English, German, French, Swedish, African or mixed marriage families,

unbearable for the children prior to the time Sinterklaas was adopted and moved a few weeks later in the year to the festival of Christmas. And if you would have told the leaders of this area that we believe we owe all today's critical freedoms and human rights to the primarily English colonies, they would indeed say "Poppycock" since Poppycock in the local dialect is from pappekak meaning "soft dung."

Who was there, how they got along, how they mixed—that is another part of this colony's unheralded legacy. An example is the land records on 32 new lots on two lanes staked out by 32 families from six different parts of Europe—Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and what is now southern Belgium, speaking five different languages. Perched alongside one another on the edge of a wilderness continent, families that would have broken up into ghettos in Europe or tightly clustered there or here in other parts of America. Instead, they had come together, and learned a common language, a microcosm of the future American society. Nothing shows better than the newly found records on intermarriage remarkable for its time. Intermarriage between ethnic groups and interracial, whites to blacks. A man from Venice marries a woman from Amsterdam. Man from Calais in France to a woman from Batavia in the East Indies. Man from St. Thomas to woman from West Africa. Norwegian to German. Swedish-English. Danish-Swedish. In that 17th century, almost no one believed that blacks and whites, men and women, Catholics and Protestants, were equals, or should be treated as such. It was an uncommon 17th century sensibility—a mix of frankness, piety, a keen business sense, an eye on the wider world, and a willingness to put up with people's differences—that formed the social glue. There was a strong belief among some that it was

morally wrong to buy and sell human beings so in the records you see an extensive range of perspectives on Africans. There was slavery but no structured slavery as developed in Virginia. And many instances of former slaves being granted freedom. And records where those of European ancestry were working for freed Africans. Africans owned property booked as “true and free ownership with such privileges as all tracts of land are bestowed on inhabitants of this province.” Slaves also had some legal rights: repeatedly, slaves appear in court, filing lawsuits against Europeans. Individual governmental authority did not have the same sway as in the other colonies. Already a type was forming, a "people kind" within this colony, which visitors were beginning to remark on: worldly, brash, confident, hustling. Now that’s a strong hint. This is not a colony planted in some obscure corner, hidden valley, or an inaccessible slope. We are talking about...Manhattan.

An example of how things worked in this colony is Governor Peter Stuyvesant’s religious prejudices: he hated Jews, loathed Catholics, recoiled at Quakers, and reserved special hatred for Lutherans. Which is to say, he was the very model of a well-bred mid-17th century European elite. Religious bigotry was a part of 17th century European and New World Colonial society. In 1654, 23 Jews showed up in Manhattan seeking asylum. His documented reaction was matter-of-fact and perfectly in character: the Jews were “a deceitful race” that would “infect” the colony if he didn’t stop them. He barred them from owning land, taking their turn at standing guard as a part of the militia, and stated if they didn’t like it, “...consent is hereby given to them to depart whenever and wherever it may please them.” However, those asylum seekers knew their rights within the system. Upon appeal, Stuyvesant’s superiors reminded him loftily of the

“each person shall remain free in his religion” law and ordered him to back off. When Quakers began proselytizing the settlers of Dutch Long Island who were mostly English, Stuyvesant became aware of their sermonizing, taunting, and their jiggling fits of spiritual frenzy for which they were named. He saw them as a threat to the peace and stability of the colony and probably out of their minds as well. When Stuyvesant forbade the town of Vlissingen from aiding and abetting them, 31 of the villagers followed the established form of complaint against the government by signing a remonstrance citing the law of “love, peace and liberty...which is the glory of the outward state (of the colony)”. They reminded him it extends even “to Jews, Turks, and Egyptians.” Therefore, they respectfully refused to obey. The so-called Flushing Remonstrance is now considered one of the foundational documents of American liberty. By that group’s existence and actions in keeping with the laws of the colony and their document’s content and example, one can reflect upon Congress “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances..” Thirty years later, in the 1680’s and shortly before the witch burnings in New England, then English Gov. Dongan casually referenced the varieties of religious experience that had proliferated within the renamed New York colony. Besides the Church of England presence, a Dutch Calvinist population, French Calvinists, Dutch Lutherans, Roman Catholics and “Singing Quakers, Ranting Quakers, Sabbatarians, Anti-sabbatarians, Some Anabaptist some Independents some Jews.” Then he added to sharpen the point, “In short of all sorts of opinions there are some, and the most part, none at all.” I guess many of us UU’s fit into the “none at all” category. Stuyvesant must have lurched in his grave.

The colony has long been thought of as small, short-lived, and relatively inconsequential, a mix of peoples—with strange customs and a different language— who appeared briefly and then vanished, leaving only traces. You might have learned the same in your American History classes. We only recently began to know this is false. While the population was quickly outpaced by New England, it was hardly small. The Manhattan colony, more broadly, New Netherlands, covered the whole middle Atlantic coast and encompassed parts of five of what would be the original 13 states. In terms of historical evidence—of written records—we are only recently beginning to gain a mountain of it, thanks to Charles Gehring. There's that name again. And when the English took over, these colonists didn't "go" anywhere. We now know that negotiations of the English takeover, the Dutch Articles of Capitulation, included the private instructions from the King of England to inform the colonists that "they shall continue to enjoy all...their same freedom.." and "enjoy the liberty of their Consciences," it read. Further, they shall chose deputies, and those deputies shall have free voice in all public affairs. Leading to the Bill of Rights many decades to come, the agreement that became the city charter of New York states they "...shall not have any soldier quartered upon them." The English King's representative recognized in print a granting of "immunities and privileges beyond what other parts of my territory do enjoy." The thinking was that the inhabitants should be allowed to maintain their way of life for the very good reason that, in contrast with the other fractious and squabbling English colonies, economically unstable for many of their inhabitants, this place worked. The influence of these colonists continued to dominate the Hudson River valleys of Eastern New York, down the Delaware River, including pieces of what is now part of

Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware an area more keyed into European trade and industriousness than anywhere else in the colonies.

In late summer of 1655, Stuyvesant rounded Cape May and anchored his flotilla between two Swedish forts on the western shore of Delaware Bay. The Swedes had maintained their presence there for 17 years in part by bringing in “forest Finns.” Previously Sweden had encouraged this particular group of Finns who live near the Russian border to settle in a remote area of central Sweden. The Finns had a way of life that revolved around clearing forests and cultivating the land making them the perfect sub-group to tame the dense, virgin woodland of Sweden. But they turned out to be too good at their task. When they refused to curtail their way of life and stop decimating the forests, the Swedes began shipping them to America taking over some abandoned Dutch forts. Stuyvesant was off to, as he put it, gain “restitution of our property.” Recognizing the overwhelming force, the Swedish commander named Von Elswick conceded with the prophetic words, “Today it’s me, tomorrow it will be you.” And New Sweden vanished into history. Nine years later Stuyvesant faced the same decision and conceded to the English. But the Swedes and Finns stayed. And thus we see the V-notching, roof construction, and a kind of modular floor plan of the American log cabin.

Moving closer to the present, when Nelson Rockefeller completed his fourth term as governor of New York and moved to the national stage, he was able to arrange a small amount of funding to begin the translation of the virtually forgotten Dutch archives that had been gathered in Albany after the British takeover. That translation is a huge undertaking. The hunt began for a

translator familiar with the archaic written Dutch of that era, a script which has changed enormously in the intervening centuries. At a conference, the person charged with finding a translator spoke by chance to Charles Gehring who had just finished a dissertation on Germanic linguistics with a concentration in Netherlandic studies asking if he knew anyone with the needed skills. The answer was, “Boy, do I”. Gehring has had only one job since, as translator of the archives of the colony. In 1999, the documents and the translations completed to date as the New Netherland Project, only a beginning of what is a treasure trove, were declared a National Treasure by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

As a side note, while doing genealogy research in the State Library in Dover, Delaware more than a decade ago, I serendipitously picked up a book to find the blurb ahead of the title page to tell the story of a mid-1600’s settler in this Swedish-Dutch eventually to become English colony on Delaware Bay that had shot his neighbor’s pig and was placed on a year’s severe probation as a consequence. As this individual was approaching the court house to be released from probation at the end of the year, he by chance encountered the sheriff who asked him to help put another person in the stocks. The pig shooter’s reply was that he would help the sheriff only if it was the sheriff he would be putting into the stocks. Needless to say, his probation was extended another year. The pig-shooter’s name that caught my eye was William Kenny—yes some traits carry on from generation to generation. But more important to this talk is that the book was one of the earliest publications of Charles Gehring’s translations of the Dutch documents that had been archived in Albany, NY for nearly 400 years and essentially forgotten. That was my first introduction to this wealth of new information that is now ever so

slowly being translated into the light. By the way, my DNA subsequently showed that Kenny ancestor was English but of Phoenician roots, not Dutch nor Swedish, and his most likely historic name was Canning, with a "C".

The melting pot character of the colony is reflected in the 1692 statement of a newly arrived British military officer complaining to his uncle in England, "Our chiefest unhappiness here is too great a mixture of nations, and English ye least part." As the Dutchness faded, the town names remained along the Hudson and beyond; Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Watervliet, Rensselaer. As late as the 1750's, English officials in the area needed to find Dutch speakers to help them communicate with the local Indians as Dutch was the only European language the tribes knew. And of course there were the energetic Dutch families, the Van Burens, Roosevelts, Vanderbilts traceable to New Netherland.

But all that is not the point of this talk. What matters about the Dutch colony is that it set Manhattan on course as a place of openness and free trade of course, but a new kind of spirit that was utterly alien to New England and to Virginia. A course which is directly traceable to the tolerance debates in Holland in those centuries and to the intellectual world of Descartes, Grotius, and Spinoza, individuals who have contributed significantly to our talks right here in this room. Only recently has the scholarly tide begin to turn to recognize the impact of the melting pot and freedoms that evolved on the island in the Hudson on what America was to become. The simple fact is that multi-ethnic, multi-racial society first formed in that exceptionally successful colony. Rhode Island and Pennsylvania followed in religious tolerance.

Other legacies have that common root such as the custom of having a public law officer prosecuting cases on behalf of the government. The English system had no such public prosecutor; at the time, the victim of a crime or his near relative was responsible for seeking justice. The Dutch official—called a “schout” evolved into the early English records to a man of law called a “scout” later “district attorney” protecting the civil rights and safety of the victim.

In 1686 when the charter for the city of New York was signed, it not only made plain these rights and privileges but was clear about their origins, acknowledging that the citizens of the “Ancient City...enjoyed...sundry rights, liberty, and privileges and franchises” that derived not from its English rulers but from the “Governors Directors Generals Commanders in Chief of the Nether Dutch Nation.” This virus of freedom spread throughout the colonies, not just among our Founding Fathers, but to all levels of society including those in temporary or permanent slavery. So Jefferson did not have to explain Locke to his share cropper neighbors or the town blacksmith. They knew--as we now know today. Moving forward to 1787, the New York delegation was among those the least enamored of a document that would give so much power to a federal government, New York possibly the most deeply infected with that virus. Meeting later in Albany, the state’s leaders decided that they could only ratify the Constitution if, among other things, a bill of specific individual rights were attached to it. The names of the 26 representatives who insisted on this were about half English and half Dutch. The first Manhattanites didn’t come with lofty ideals. There was a distinct messiness to the place they created. But it was very real and, in a way, very modern. And we believers in those sacred freedoms will continue to be heard.