

# The Origins of New Netherland Agricultural Terminology

by Jan Stroop

**T**HE ORIGIN AND development of the Dutch colony of New Netherland is covered in a number of historical publications. Prime examples are *The Island at the Center of the World* by Russell Shorto and *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* by Jaap Jacobs.<sup>1</sup> Both authors made extensive use of the collection of Dutch-language colonial manuscripts housed at the New York State Archives in Albany. The first three volumes in this collection comprise the Register of the Provincial Secretary. They contain a wide range of documents, including depositions, contracts, estate inventories, leases, deeds, wills, bonds, powers of attorney, and other private instruments. Together these provide ample information about farming, households, environment, people, quarrels, and so on, and are a rich source for the economic and social life of the colonists.<sup>2</sup>

While the contents of the Register of the Provincial Secretary have been widely used by historians, the actual language in which the documents are written has not received much scholarly attention. Most of these documents were drawn up by Cornelis van Tienhoven, provincial secretary from 1638 to 1649 and 1651 to 1652. Van Tienhoven employed the “official,” written Dutch which was commonly used in the Dutch Republic. For

the most part, this is boilerplate legalese, drawn from manuals for notaries. But Van Tienhoven was a bookkeeper and administrator, not a farmer. When, for example, drawing up an inventory of a

<sup>1</sup> Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (Leiden, 2004); Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Center of the World* (New York, London, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For the Provincial Register see <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/research/online-publications/register-of-the-provincial-secretary-1638-1660/>

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*The provinces of the Netherlands.*

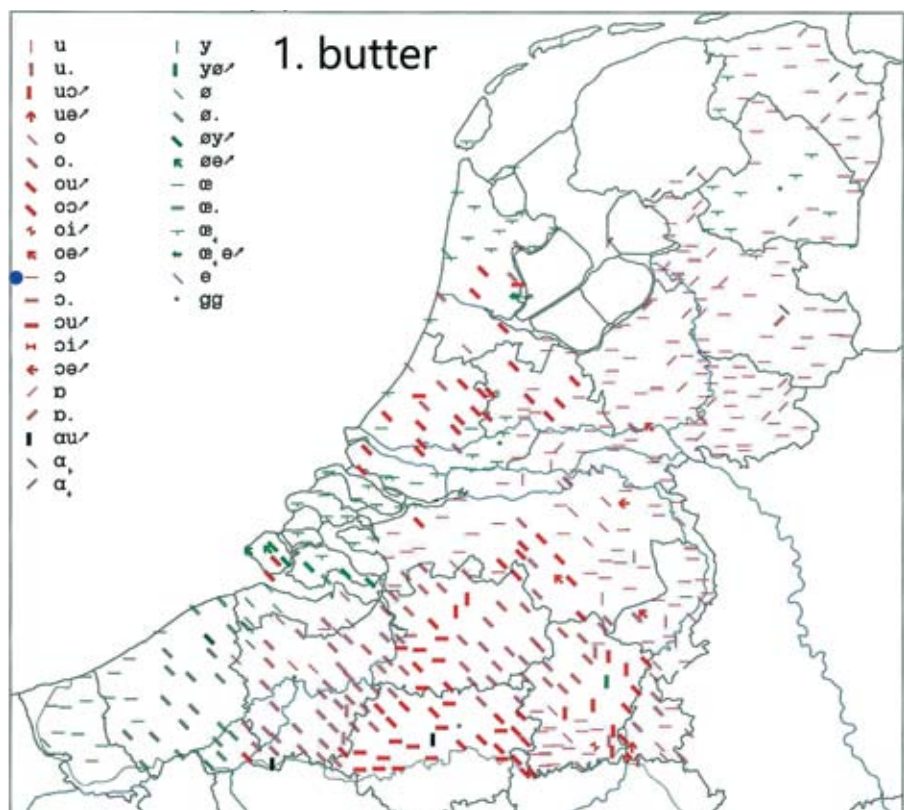
*bouwerij* (“farm”) and its various animals and implements, he most likely recorded the agricultural terminology used by the farmers appearing before him. And that’s where it gets linguistically interesting. The official written Dutch language as used by officials like Van Tienhoven was uniform over all the Dutch Republic. In contrast, the agricultural terminology shows a considerable regional variety within the seven Dutch provinces. Examples are *merrie* and *marrypaert* (“mare”), *coebeest* and *coybeest* (“cow”), and *sug*, *soch*, and *seug* (“sow”), each with different vowels.<sup>3</sup> This variety is reflected in the Register of the Provincial Secretary, opening up an interesting linguistic perspective on the regional origins of the New Netherland colonists and their language. This article explores the linguistic variety of a small number of agricultural terms found in the 1638–1649 and 1651–1652 Register of the Provincial Secretary.

According to Jacobs, the colonials or colonizers, especially the farmers, came mostly from the poor provinces of Gelderland, Drenthe, and Overijssel.<sup>4</sup> Because the farmer’s terms, of course, emigrated with the settlers, they are the same as those used in old Netherlands. Some of these terms appear throughout the Dutch language area: *hengst* (“stallion”), *merry* (“mare”), *geyten* (“goats”), *varckens* (“pigs”), *schapen* (“sheep”), *rogge* (“rye”), *garst* (“barley”), *mays* (“corn”), *erreten* (“peas”), *zicht* (“sight”), and so on.

A number of words only occur in a certain part of the Dutch language area. This offers opportunities to determine where the speaker of a certain word came from. If one can determine where such a word originated, one can cautiously dare to conclude that the word in New Netherland came from that region. Caution or some “wiggle room” is required because I use dialect maps from the twentieth century. Changes may have occurred in the language’s geographical situation since the seventeenth century, although I do not think that agricultural terminology has changed very much, because farming is by definition, traditional.

### 1. Butter (*butter*)

My first case is not specifically agricultural, it is the word “butter.” All variants of the word *butter*, including the English form, descend from the



Latin word *butyrum*.<sup>5</sup> In New Netherland a special pronunciation of the word butter was in use, namely *botter*. *Botter* has the same vowel [ɔ] as in English *hot*. It also occurs in the Netherlands but in a limited area. This can be seen on the map below from the *Phonological Atlas of the Dutch* (FAND). The form *botter* is marked with a blue dot in the legend.

The places with the pronunciation *botter* are represented on the map by a horizontal red dash (hard to see for those who have

difficulty with colors, but magnified, it is possible). If I am seeing correctly, the form *botter* appears in the provinces of Utrecht and Gelderland, but not in Holland. The word *botter* is frequently found in New

<sup>3</sup> For *merrie*, *marry paert* (“mare”) see <https://www.meertens.knaw.nl/kaartenbank/proxy/image/13110>. For *coebeest*, *coybeest* (“cow”) see <https://www.meertens.knaw.nl/kaartenbank/proxy/image/13076>. For *sug*, *soch*, *seug* (“sow”) see map 5 in this article.

<sup>4</sup> Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/butter>

***This map by Jac. Van Ginneken, as well as the rest of the maps in this article, is from the digital Kaartenbank (Bank of Maps) of the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam. See Joep Kruijssen and Nicoline van der Sijs, compilers (2016), Meertens Card Bank, at www.meertens.knaw.nl/kaartenbank/; first version launched in 2014.***





Netherland documents because butter was used as a means of payment in the absence of hard currency.

## 2. Keu (piglet)

With the name for a young pig, a piglet, we get to actual farming terminology. In the documents from New Netherland I found the name *keu* for “piglet”:

*sugge, die van dese somer een ceue is geweest* (21 July 1639)

(sow, which was a piglet last summer)<sup>6</sup>

*7 ceuen out 2 maenden daervan 3 sochgins ende 4 beertins* (7 July 1651)

(7 piglets 2 months old, of them 3 small sows and 4 small boars).<sup>7</sup>

The word *keu* still occurs in an Utrecht-Gelders area in the Netherlands. Exactly in that area *keu* is used as a call word for “pig in general.” The transition from call word to the name for a “small pig,” which has taken place in Dutch, seems logical. The map was made by Jacob van Ginneken (1877–1945), a prominent linguist in the Netherlands. The map was never published; it is in the archive Jac van Ginneken at the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam.

The word *keu* is related to *kodde*; probably the original meaning is “something round.” Dr. Charles Gehring at the New Netherland Institute notes that in English, the development has gone the other way around. That’s where the Old English noun *swin* [svi:n] diphthongizes into *swine*, but survives in the pig call “sooey” [sui:].<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Bul (bull)

In New Netherland, the term *bestiaal* was common for “herd, all animals of a farm together.” In addition, *bestiaal* was also used for a single head of cattle. In those two senses, the word in the Dutch language region has fallen into disuse. *Bestiaal* seems to be one of the terms that the West India Company introduced, such as *bouwerij* (bowery).<sup>9</sup>

An important animal of the *bestiaal* was the bull. The Dutch name in New Netherland is *bul*; see this quote:

*Barent Dircksz sal gehouden wesen te leveren aen de heurders vier melckcoyen, twee veers pincken, 1 veers calff, drie bul calveren, een mary*

*paert ende 2 hengsten, een jarige soch, twee wagens, een nieuw ende gangbare ploech, een egge ende vorder alles wat nu by de bouwery bevonden sal worden. . . . Den verheurder sal oock aen de heurders leveren drie oude soggen, seven beertjes ende een jonge sogge.* (18 Mayo 1639)

Barent Dircksz shall be bound to deliver to the lessees four milch cows, two heifers, 1 heifer calf, three bull calves, one mare and 2 stallions, one farrow sow, two wagons, one new plow in working order, one harrow, and furthermore all that is now to be found on the farm. . . . The lessor shall also deliver to the lessees three old sows, seven little boars and one young sow. (18 May 1639)<sup>10</sup>

*Bul*, with this vowel, occurs in the provinces of North Holland (including the island of Tessel) and South Holland and in Utrecht. *Bul* is represented on the map by a drop with the tip down. This includes also the drops that include a vertical dash that stands for another word, namely stier. This means that in a location both words are in use, *bul* and *stier*. Dutch *bul* is the same word as English bull. Bull probably comes

from an Indo-European verb *\*bhel-* which means “to swell.”<sup>11</sup>

## 4. Berg (barrow)

In the following quote the names for pigs of different gender stand together:

*2 vercken sijnde bergen 1½ Jaer out; 2 soggen Item; 1 burgh ende een beertin out ½ Jaer; 7 Ceuen out 2 maenden daervan 3 sochgins ende 4 beertins* (7 July 1651)

(2 barrow pigs, 1½ year old; 2 sows, ditto; 1 barrow and one little boar, ½ year old; 7 piglets, 2 months old, of which 3 little small sows and 4 little

<sup>6</sup> Bond of Gerrit Jansen from Oldenburg to Jonas Bronck, July 21, 1639, Register of the Provincial Secretary, 1638–1642, New York Colonial Manuscripts Vol. 1: 140, New York State Archives, Albany [hereafter NYCM]; translation in A. J. F. Van Laer, trans. and ed., 3 vols., *Register of the Provincial Secretary* (Baltimore, 1974), 1: 195 [hereafter NYHM].

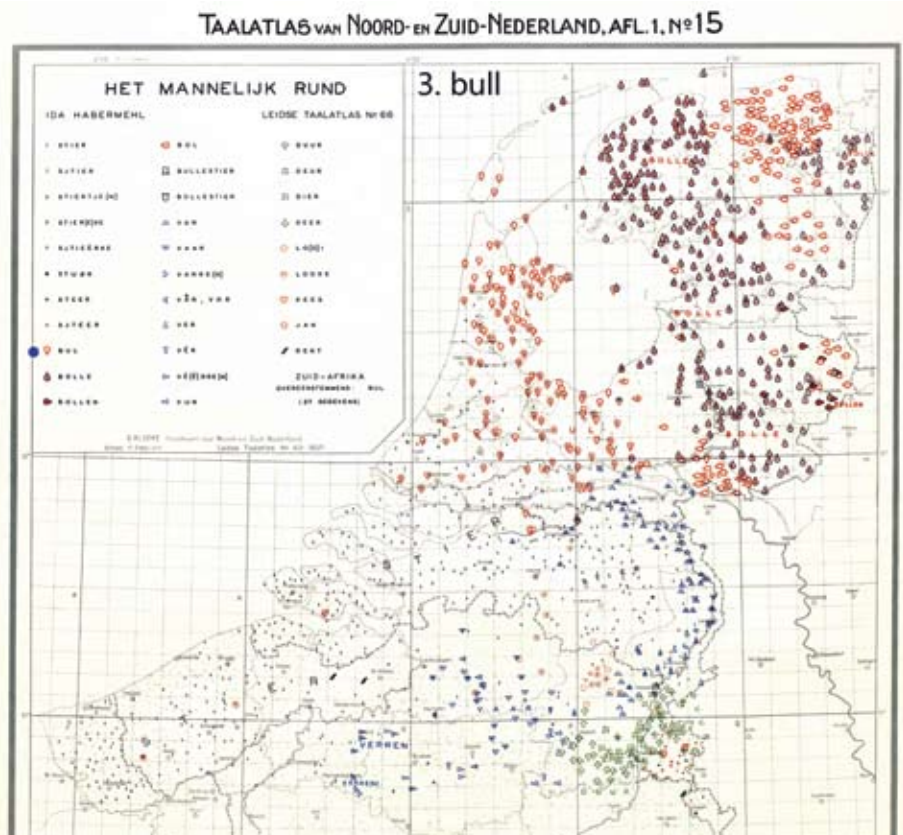
<sup>7</sup> Inventory of the Estate of Jan Jansen Damen, July 7, 1651, NYCM 3: 87e; NYHM 3: 275.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s correspondence with Charles Gehring, May 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Nicoline van der Sijs, *Yankees, cookies en dollars* (Amsterdam 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Contract of sale of a tobacco plantation from Barent Dircksen to Gerrit Jansen and Volckert Evertsen, May 18, 1639 NYCM 1: 119; NYHM 1: 166.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/bull>.

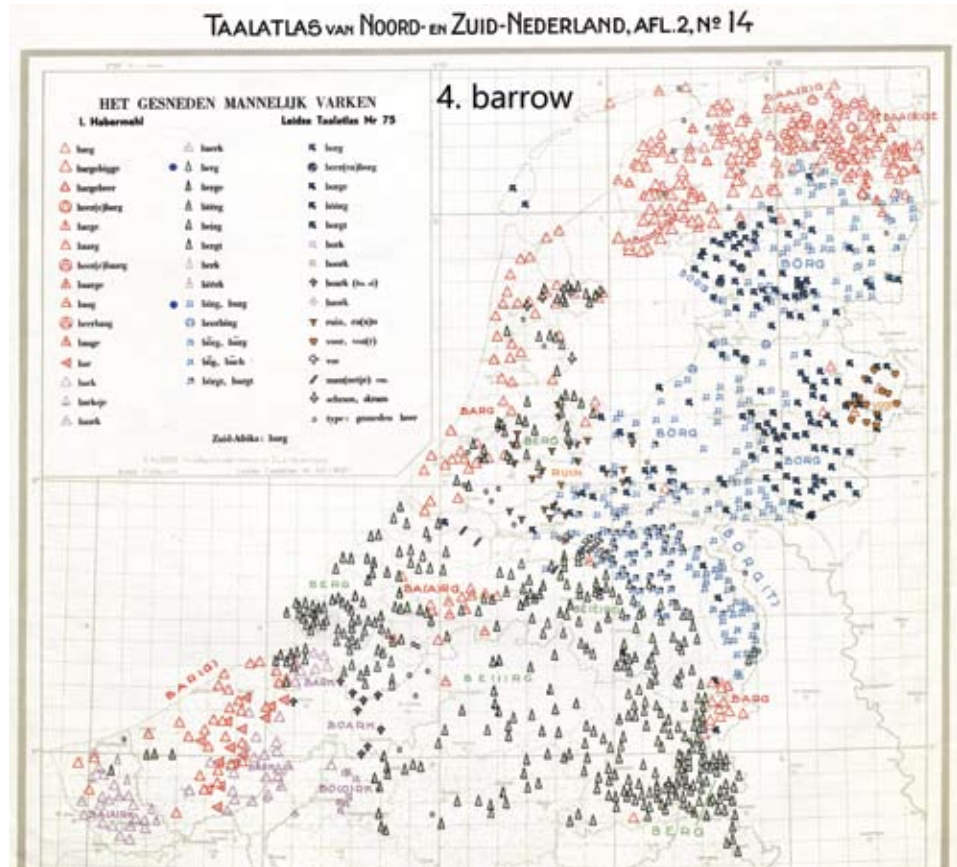


boars (7 July 1651)<sup>12</sup>

There are two heteronyms for barrow (castrated male pig) in this passage: *berg* and *burg*. They exist in different Dutch areas. *Berg* is a bit more general with its spread in North Holland, South Holland, and Zeeland. *Burg* can be found in the western part of the province of Gelderland and in some places in Utrecht and Drente. Two different names in one text suggest that there have been two informants, although the text—a comprehensive estate inventory—does not indicate that. *Berg*, *burg*, and also English *barrow* are connected with an old verb *berian* which means “to beat.”<sup>13</sup>

### 5. Zeug (sow)

The most common name for the female pig (“sow”) in Dutch is *zeug*, at least when I measure all the sound variants and there are quite a few: *zoog*, *zog*, *zoeg*, *zeug*, *zeu*, *zug*. English *sow* and Dutch *zog* (and variants) have the same origin: the Proto-Germanic reconstructed form *\*sugô-*, which is a derivation of Indo-European root *\*su-*.<sup>14</sup> Jan Goossens wrote a fascinating article about the interesting, complex origins of these variants in 1999. His description of the spread of the variant *zog* is: “The term *zog*, roughly drawn, is



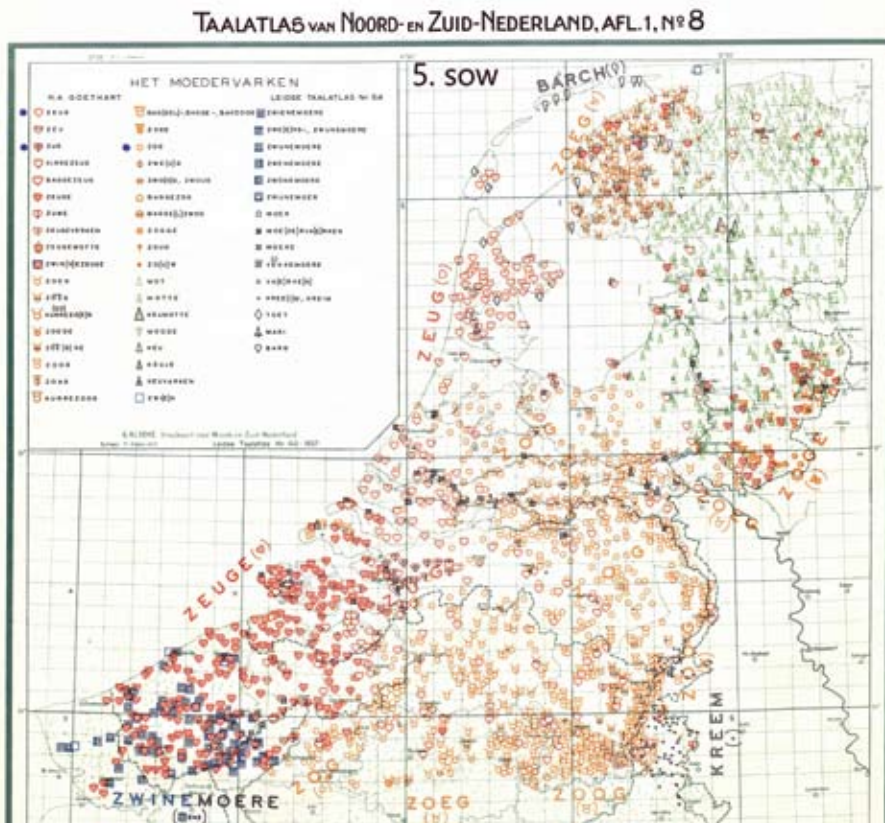
Noordbrabant's, Kleverland's, Utrecht's, and reaching into the south via an offshoot along the Schelde to the southeastern part of East Flanders.”<sup>15</sup>

Of all the *zog* areas mentioned, only one can be connected to the colonization of New Netherland and that is Utrecht. It is nice to see that *zog/sog/soch* also appears as a variant in New Netherland:

*drie oude soggen, . . . ende een jonge sogge* (18 May 1639); *eenjarige soch* (1644); *2 soggen* (1651); *3 sochgins* (1651); *Twee soggen* (1651).

*(three old sows, . . . and a young sow* (18 May 1639); *one-year-old sow* (1644); *2 sows* (1651); *3 sows* (1651); *Two sows* (1651).<sup>16</sup>

Two other variants, *sug* and *seug*, also occur in New Netherland and we also find them in regions that could have provided settlers: *zug* in 't Gooi and in North-West Veluwe, and *zeug* sporadically in Utrecht but frequently in West Friesland and on Tessel, which can be seen on map 5.



<sup>12</sup> Inventory of the Estate of Jan Jansen Damen, July 7, 1651, NYCM 3: 87e; NYHM 3: 275.

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bearg#Old\\_English](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/bearg#Old_English).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/sow>.

<sup>15</sup> J. Goossens, “Het vocalisme van *zeug*,” *Taal en Tongval* 51 (January 1999), 154–65.

<sup>16</sup> Inventory of the Estate of Jan Jansen Damen, July 7, 1651, NYCM 3: 87e; NYHM 3: 275.



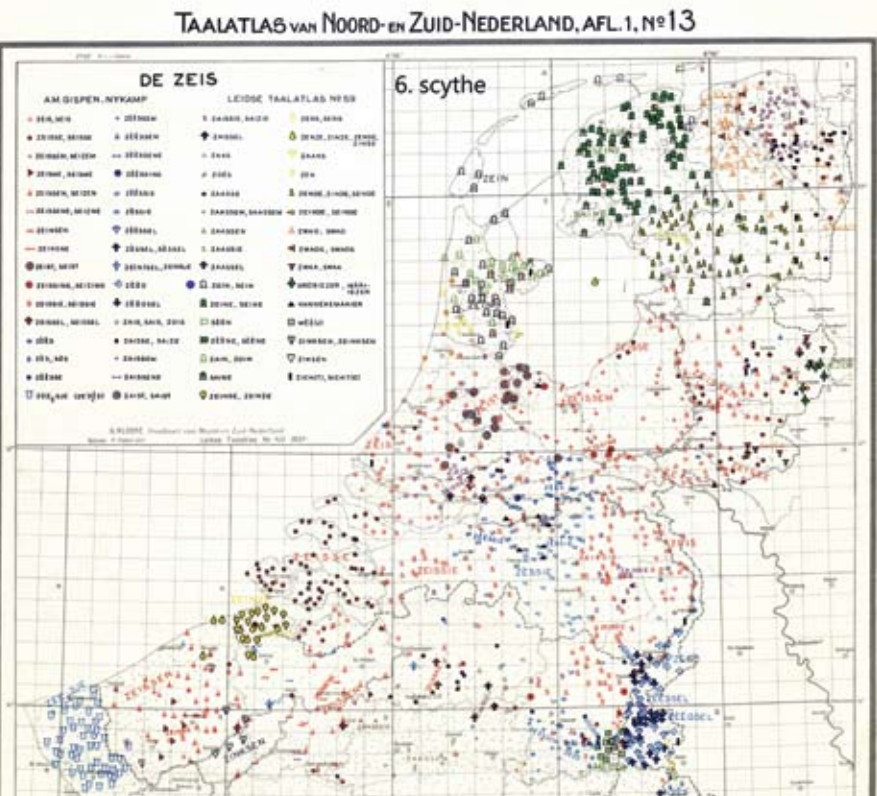
## 6. Sein (scythe)

Most tools for the “bowery” have a name in New Netherland that is in use throughout the Netherlands and probably it was also in the seventeenth century. A number of agricultural names that we find in New Netherland refer to the center of the Netherlands, the province of Utrecht and also more to the east. These are areas known as the homeland of some settlers.

Other areas also supplied settlers at some point, as seen in the names for the scythe. It is also called a *sein* in New Netherland. For example, in the following deed of sale:

*Jacobus van Curler vercoopt in presentie van de naerbes. getuygen aen Tienhoven voornt. de voorge-melte bouwery groot hondert morgen lants, de huysing daerop staende, alle gereetschappen op de bouwery wesende welverstaende wagen, ploech, egge, seynen, zichten (mits-gaders vorder alles tot boeren werck nodich). (1639)*

Jacobus van Curler, in the presence of the subscribing witnesses, sells to Tienhoven the above mentioned farm, containing one hundred morgens of



land, the house standing thereon, all the implements being on the farm, to wit, a wagon, a plow, a harrow, **scythes** and sights (together with all that is needed for farm work).<sup>17</sup>

That word *sein*, also written *zein*, appears on the map only in the provinces of North Holland and on the northern Wadden Islands, including on the island of Tessel. In the first half of the seventeenth century there must have been at least one person in New Netherland who came from one of these areas. Jacobus van Curler probably had heard that word from a person, because he himself came from Nijkerk, which is located in the province of Gelderland. And that’s where the scythe is called a *zeis*. Further information is missing.

## 7. Veulen (foal)

The names for the young horse, foal in English, show the following variants:

*een volingh paert* (18 May 1639) (a foal)<sup>18</sup>

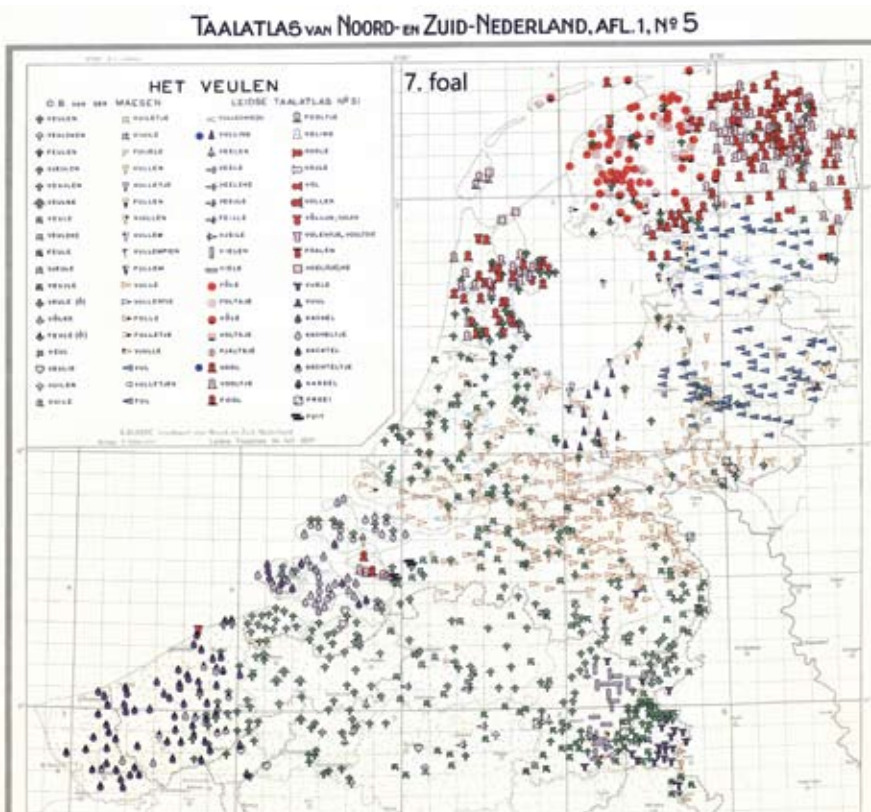
*hengst vool* (22 September 1643) (stallion foal)<sup>19</sup>

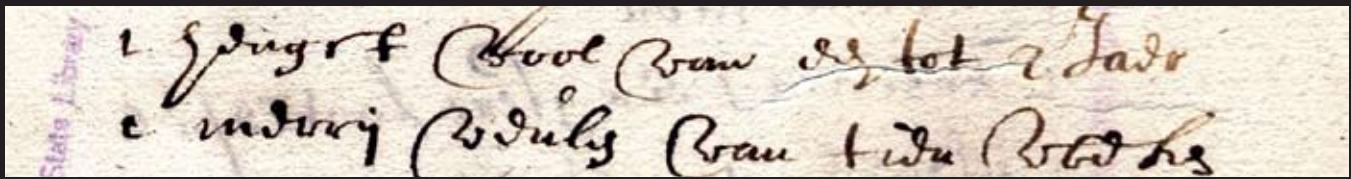
in the same text: *merry veulen* (22

<sup>17</sup> Deed from Jacobus van Curler to Corneli van Tienhoven, [May] 1639, NYCM 1: 106; NYHM 1: 147.

<sup>18</sup> Contract of sale of a tobacco plantation from Barent Dircksen to Gerrit Jansen and Volckert Evertsen, May 18, 1639, NYCM 1: 119; NYHM 1: 166.

<sup>19</sup> Inventory of Vredendael, September 22, 1643, NYCM 2: 60a. Nicoline van der Sijs, *Yankees, cookies en dollars* (Amsterdam 2009).





*1 hengst vool van een tot 2 jaer (1 stallion colt between and 2 years old).  
1 merry veulen van tien weken (1 filly of ten weeks).*

*From “Inventory of the goods and effects delivered by Mr. La Montagne to Bout Francen” (1643),  
Register of the Provincial Secretary, document 60a, lines 9 and 10.*

September 1643) (mare foal)<sup>20</sup>

*een hengst veulen van may lesteleden*  
(1643) (a stallion foal of last May)<sup>21</sup>

*een hengst vullen* (6 September 1646)  
(a stallion foal)<sup>22</sup>

*merry vool* (November 1651) (mare  
foal)<sup>23</sup>

*jonck merry veul* (6 July 1651) (young  
mare foal)<sup>24</sup>

Those variants can all be linked to a region in the Netherlands. *Volingh paert* I equate with *vulling*, used in Utrecht and in the Veluwe. On the border between Utrecht and Gelderland, one form of *volling* is seen. *Vool* appears in North Holland. *Veulen* in the region south of Amsterdam, but also in several other areas. We find *vullen* in the district Gooi, Utrecht, and in the Veluwe, which can be seen on map 7.

*Veulen*, *vullen*, and *voling* are etymologically considered diminutives of *vool*. Because that diminutive suffix of the word contained an *i*-vowel, the root vowel of the stressed syllable, the *oo* was unlauded to *eu*. The forms *hengst vool* (stallion foal) and *merry veulen* (mare foal) are in the same document of September 22, 1643; in fact they are written together.<sup>25</sup>

The thought that *merry veulen* (mare foal) is smaller than a *hengst vool* (stallion foal) and therefore gets that diminutive, *veul+en*, I have to put aside because elsewhere a stallion foal is also called a *hengst veulen*. In *berg* and *burg* (Part 4), we saw something similar: they are also both in the same document. One would think there might be two different speakers or informants. But that is not likely because the words are, in both cases, in an inventory of a “bouwerij” (farm).

## 8. Conclusion

Taking stock of the concepts discussed, my conclusion is that the dissemination of New Netherland terminology in the Netherlands corresponds in most parts to the origin of the migrants observed by Jaap Jacobs “from the less wealthy provinces of the Republic, Gelderland Drenthe, and Overijssel.”<sup>26</sup> His observation concerns emigration in the later period, which is from about 1650 until the end of the New Netherland in 1674. No Drentse words were found in the documents that have been reviewed. A relationship with Gelderland and especially the Veluwe appeared several times, but Utrecht in particular is frequently represented.

A region which Jacobs does not mention and which is particularly present in the terminology is North Holland. It concerns the following words: *vool*,

*vooltje* (foal) exclusively in North-Holland; *fooltje* (foal) on the island of Texel; *sein/zein* (scythe) exclusively in North Holland, also on Texel; *berg* (barrow in North-Holland (but not exclusively)).<sup>27</sup>

The fact that these words also occur in New Netherland is an indication that settlers also came from the mentioned areas, although we do not know their names.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lease of a farm on Long Island from Anthony Jansen to Edmund Adley, September 6, 1646, NYCM 2: 148b.

<sup>23</sup> Lease from the Agents of Anna Bogardus to Evert Pels, November 1, 1651, NYCM 3: 97.

<sup>24</sup> Inventory of the estate of Jan Jansen Damen, July 6, 1651, NYCM 3: 87d(1).

<sup>25</sup> Inventory of Vredendael, September 22, 1643, NYCM 2: 60a.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, *New Netherland*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> *Taalatlas van Noord- en Zuid-Nederland* (Leiden, 1938–1952).

