

Classic Poetry Series

Jacob Steendam
- poems -

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Jacob Steendam(1616 - 1672)

Jacob Steendam was a Dutch poet and a minister. He collaborated with Pieter Corneliszoon Plockhoy.

Biography

Already as a young man Steendam served the West India Company. In 1641 he went to Gold Coast and had an affair with a local woman. In 1649 he remarried in Amsterdam. He came to the colony of New Amsterdam about 1650, and stayed there till 1662, when he returned to Holland. During his residence in the Dutch settlement, he owned farms at Amersfort and Mespath, a house and lot on what is now Pearl Street, and another on Broadway. He lost his fortune when the English took over Manhattan. He left Nieuw Nederland and in 1665 he made a voyage to Batavia with his wife, where he died as the manager of the orphanage.

In the late 19th century, the little that was known of Jacob Steendam was due to the research of Henry Cruse Murphy, who, when he was United States minister to The Hague, discovered some poems written by Steendam on New Amsterdam, and had them printed with an English version in the same metre. Murphy's book is entitled *Jacob Steendam noch vaster. A Memoir of the First Poet in New Netherlands, with his Poems descriptive of the Colony* (The Hague, 1861). The titles of the two poems are "Complaint of New Amsterdam, in New Netherlands, to her Mother, of her Beginning, Growth, and Present Condition," and "The Praise of New Netherlands: Spurring Verses to the Lovers of the Colony and Brotherhood to be established on the South River of New Netherland. Pieter Corneliszoon Plockhoy, of Ziireckzee."

In Praise Of New Netherland

"You poor, who know not how your living to obtain;
You affluent, who seek in mind to be content;
Choose you New Netherland, which no one shall disdain;
Before you time and strength here fruitlessly are spent.

The birds obscure the sky, so numerous in their flight;
The animals roam wild, and flatten down the ground;
The fish swarm in the waters and exclude the light;
The oysters there, than which none better can be found;
Are piled up, heap on heap, till islands they attain;
And vegetation clothes the forest, mean and plain.

...a living view does always meet your eye,
Of Eden, and the promised land of Jacob's seed;
Who would not, then, in such a formed community,
Desire to be a Freeman; and the rights decreed,
To each and every one, by Amstel's burgher lords,
T'enjoy? and treat with honor what their rule awards?"

Jacob Steendam

The Complaint Of New Amsterdam

I'm a grandchild of the Gods
Who on th' Amstel have abodes;
Whence their orders forth are sent
Swift for aid and punishment.

I, of Amsterdam, was born,
Early of her breasts forlorn;
From her care so quickly weaned
Oft have I my fate bemoaned.

From my youth up left alone,
Naught save hardship have I known;
Dangers have beset my way
From the first I saw the day.

Think you that a cause for marvel ?
This will then the thread unravel,
And the circumstances trace,
Which upon my birth took place.

Would you ask for my descent?
Long the time was it I spent
In the loins of warlike Mars.
'T seems my mother, seized with fears,

Prematurely brought me forth.
But I now am very loth
To inform how this befol;
Though 'twas thus, I know full well.

Bacchus, too,-it is no dream,
First beheld the daylight's beam
From the thigh of Jupiter.
But my reasons go too far.

My own matter must I say,
And not loiter by the way,
Yen though Bacchus oft has proven
Friend to ine in my misfortune.

Now the mid-wife who received me,
Was Bellona; in suspense, she
Long did sit in trembling fear,
For the travail was severe.

From the moment I was born,
Indian neighbors made me mourn.
They pursued me night and day,
While my mother kept away.

But my sponsors did supply
Better my necessity;
They sustained my feeble life;
They procured a bounteous wife

As my nurse, who did not spare
To my lips her paps to bare.
This was Ceres; freely she
Rendered what has nurtured me.

Her most dearly will I prize;
She has made my horns to rise;
Trained my growth through tender years,
'Midst my burdens and my cares.

True, both simple 'twas and scant,
What I had to feed my want.
Oft 't was nought except Supawn
And the flesh of buck or fawn.

When I thus began to grow,
No more care did they bestow.
Yet my breasts are full and neat,
And my hips are firmly set.

Neptune shows me his good will;
Merc'ry, quick, exerts his skill
Me t'adorn with silk and gold;
Whence I'm sought by suitors bold.

Stricken by my cheek's fresh bloom,

By my beauteous youthful form,
They attempt to seize the treasure
To enjoy their wanton pleasure.

They, my orchards too, would plunder.
Truly 'tis a special wonder,
That a maid, with such a portion,
Does not suffer more misfortune

For, I venture to proclaim,
No one can a maiden name,
Who with richer land is blessed
Than th' estate by me possessed.

See! two streams my garden bind,
From the East and North they wind,
Rivers pouring in the sea,
Rich in fish, beyond degree.

Milk and butter; fruits to eat
No one can enumerate;
Ev'ry vegetable known;
Grain tbc best that e'er was grown.

All the blessings man e'er knew,
Here does our Great Giver strew,
(And a climate;ne'er more pure)
But for me,-yet immature,

Fraught with danger; for the Swine
Trample down these crops of mine;
Up-root, too, my choicest land;
Still and dumb, the while, I stand,

In the hope, my mother's arm
Will protect me from the harm.
She can succour my distress.
Now my wish, my sole request,

Is for men to till my land;
So I'll not in silence stand.
I have lab'rors almost none;

Let my household large become;

I'll my mother's kitchen furnish
With my knicknacks, with my surplus;
With tobacco, furs and grain;
So that Prussia she'll disdain.

Jacob Steendam