

Introduction

The life of the historian these days seems to be determined by commemorations. Almost every year some city or treaty or declaration has been around for exactly so many centuries; captains and kings, though departed, celebrate their birthdays with pomp and circumstance. A new set of servants is ready to oblige them, to hold conferences, read papers, write books—in short, to observe the holy occasion with due respect. All this is fine and good; it brings people together, it advances knowledge, it revives the past. The one condition is that the servants remain independent, free to say whatever they want to say. The historian needs his own way to celebrate.

That is why in this introduction we shall resist the temptation to express our gratitude for the fact that we are celebrating two hundred years of friendship between the Netherlands and the United States. All we want to say is that it is precisely this friendship, this interdependence of liberty of our Western world, that makes our independence as historians possible. We should never forget that fact.

What it means to us here and now is that we can argue and discuss in full freedom what the relations between the two nations have meant in their historical perspective. Thanks to the wise decision of the Dutch government, an opportunity has been provided for historical reflection in this bicentennial year. Thanks to the Dutch Ministry of Education and Science, that reflection has been well organized in a symposium, held in Amsterdam, June 1–4, 1982. Thanks to the Dutch Historical Association and the Netherlands American Studies Association, who sponsored the symposium, there was an audience willing to listen to and participate in the discussions. Thanks to the Dutch publishing firms of Meulenhoff and Nyhoff and the American firm of Farrar, Straus and Giroux (and its division Octagon Books), the Acta of the symposium could be printed in this book and illustrated with so many attractive pictures.

Thanks are due to many people but most of all to the speakers who so gracefully accepted our invitation to share their knowledge with us and enlighten our understanding of what is really a rather complicated relation. As will be seen from the contents of the book, we divided the subject into three parts, corresponding to the three days of the symposium. The first day dealt with the diplomatic and

economic relations of the two countries; the second was devoted to Dutch immigration to and settlement in the United States; and the third day focused on the perception that the two nations had and perhaps still have of each other. Of course, much more could be said; we could have gone on for seven days instead of three. But we hope that we have at least covered some of the most essential aspects of our bilateral bicentennial and stimulated further research and discussion.

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