

The First Irishman in New York

BY DAN MILNER

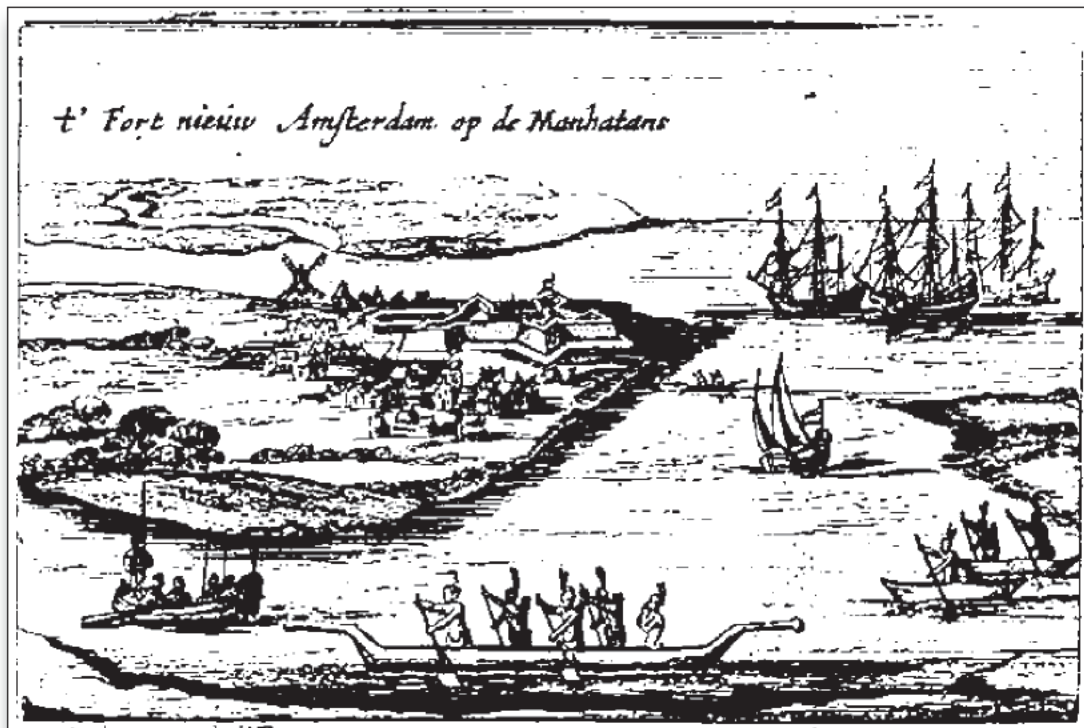


Illustration:
A view of New Amsterdam published in Europe by Joost Hartgers early in the 1600s. The engraving is intended to show the Dutch fort at the tip of Manhattan, the surrounding settlement, and typical Dutch and Native American vessels. Courtesy of New York Public Library.

In the autumn of 1643, the French missionary Isaac Jogues landed at New Amsterdam following a six-day journey down the North (Hudson) River. He came almost straight from Hell—almost only because he had spent an intervening month and a half under the protection of the commandant at Fort Orange (Albany), 142 miles upstream. Father Jogues and twenty-two French and Huron companions had been captured the preceding year by a Mohawk Iroquois war party. Badly beaten and horribly mutilated, they were staked to the ground with hot coals thrown on them and their bodies punctured repeatedly with sharp augers. A few of the party were summarily executed. Others were slowly burned alive (Martin 1885, 71–110). After thirteen months in captivity, Jogues was finally ransomed by the Dutch at Fort Orange, acting as proxies for their French allies (Martin 1885, 149–52).

Jogues was the first Catholic priest to walk the streets of officially Calvinist New Amsterdam. That distinction, plus reports of his terrify-

ing ordeal and the terrible deformities he bore, raised considerable interest amongst the townsfolk. Violent, fatal disputes had already raged between New Amsterdam's European settlers and their Native American neighbors. Of course, the savage taking of civilian life was not unique to the Western Hemisphere. Contemporaneously in Ireland, thousands met grisly deaths.

Father Jogues wrote of the nineteen-year old settlement, "On the island of Manhate, and in its environs, there may well be four or five hundred men of different sects and nations: the Director General told me that there were men of eighteen different languages; they are scattered here and there on the river, above and below, as the beauty and convenience of the spot has invited each to settle" (Jameson 1909, 259–60). A weeping Polish man, a Lutheran, came to the priest and kissed his mutilated hands repeating the words, "Martyr of Jesus Christ!" A Portuguese woman showed him pictures of the Blessed Virgin and of Aloysius Gonzaga, a fellow Jesuit beatified a few years

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earlier. But the meeting that pleased Jogues most was his encounter with a “good Irish Catholic, who arrived during his stay from the Virginia coast” and who made it his “first and urgent duty...to approach the Sacraments” (Martin 1885, 153–54).



Illustration:

In 1664, the English seized New Netherland from the Dutch, and New Amsterdam was named New York in honor of Charles Stuart, Duke of York. Later in life, Charles became a Roman Catholic, and in 1688 his accession to the throne as James II gave him the title of king of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Courtesy of Hoocher.com.

THE IRISHMAN’S NAME

Father Jogues did not record the Irishman’s name, so the chance encounter was a matter of interest even before Leo Hershkowitz (1996, 12) gave it increased currency with a mention in “The Irish in the Emerging City: Settlement to 1844,” written for Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher’s *The New York Irish*. In 1966, Edward Robb Ellis (1966, 60) pointed to one Hugh O’Neal, stating he “married a Dutch widow the very year that Father Jogues paid the city a short visit.” Ellis’s date and details were incorrect however. O’Neal wed the widow of Adriaen van der Donck, a wealthy lawyer and the author of the important early natural history, *A Description of New Netherland*. But van der Donck did not die until 1655, twelve years after Jogues’ visit—and

following the nuptials, the couple repaired to Hugh O’Neal’s home in Patuxent, Maryland (Brodhead 1853–87 I, 533).

Anonymous for centuries, the “good Irish Catholic” has now been identified. He was born somewhere in Ireland *circa* 1613 (Riker 1999; Stillwell 1887). English and Dutch documents refer to him variously by similar sounding names, including “William Golder,” “Golding,” “Goulder” and “Goulding.” The inconsistency is not particularly meaningful because the importance of standardized spelling dates only from the mid-eighteenth century when the first edition of Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) was published. Moreover, the Irishman moved between three cultures, and most surviving documents relating to him were written by colonial officials rather than his own hand.

Of the surnames by which he was frequently known, two are rarely found in Ireland while two are well established in their provincial strongholds. As a frame of reference, the 1911 *Census of Ireland* (The National Archives of Ireland) enumerated just three Goulders and 11 Golders, but 233 Goldings and 602 Gouldings.

The Goldings were principally located in counties Dublin (83), Galway (54) and Mayo (46). Thirteen of the Dubliners were Roman Catholic, 22 Jewish, and 24 members of various Protestant faiths, indicating the name was shared by a number of cultures. Beyond Dublin, which as the seat of government, a major port, and the island’s pre-eminent urban center has long attracted a more diverse population than the countryside, almost all Goldings identified themselves as Catholics.

Of the 602 Gouldings, nearly one-third (196) lived in County Cork, while another 84 resided in the adjacent counties of Kerry (31), Limerick (19), Tipperary (4), and Waterford (30). Catholic Irish (538) accounted for slightly less than ninety percent of the Goulding total nationwide. There were 61 Protestant Gouldings; 45 being members of the Church of Ireland, 12 Presbyterians and 4 Methodists, while no religious preference was entered for the remainder. Because the Irishman signed and gave his surname as Gouldinge and Goulding (Brodhead 1853–87 XIV, 535, 622) during the

Duke of York's proprietorship when an atmosphere conducive towards Catholicism prevailed, he is referred to herein principally as William Goulding.

AN INDENTURED SERVANT IN VIRGINIA

On August 21, 1535, a 22-year old passenger manifested as William Golder became one of 152 "Persons to be transported to Virginia by the *George*, [under the command of] Mr. John Severne, after examination by the Minister of Gravesend" (Coldham 1988, 163). His name and age appear on the passenger list immediately following that of his master (Hotten 1874, 124). He was the indentured servant of a man fifteen years his senior, Edward Abbs. Once in Virginia, the spelling of both names altered—Abbs became Abbes, and Golder became Goulder (McCartney 2007, 77). They were just two of some two-thousand immigrants who sailed for Virginia that year, greatly swelling the colony's European population, which grew from less than fifteen hundred in 1624 to an estimated five thousand by 1635 (Coldham 1987, ix–x).

Indentured servitude was a standard practice used to populate American colonies, both Dutch and English. An indentured servant was in actuality an all-purpose employee whose passage was paid by a sponsor, either fully or in part. Servants incurred an obligation to work a certain number of years but, during terms of their indentures, they could be bought and sold similarly to slaves. During the term, the employee received food and clothing, and learned farming and/or a trade. At the end of the contract, the servant became a free person who might be granted some land and who could acquire the right to vote subject to the laws of the jurisdiction (Morison 1965, 82).

When master and servant agreed, it was a boon to both parties. When they did not, it was likely a constant, sore vexation. Broadside ballads printed in London as early as 1612 alternately extolled the virtues of Virginia:

*Where Capons are so cheap, and Eggs
are in such plenty
Also such Fowl and Fish, and other
things most dainty:*

*As Pigs, Veal, Lamb, and Venison, if
Travellers speak truly,
Which is the cause so many go, and
travels to Virginny.
(Bodleian. 4o Rawl, 566(165).)*

They also lamented a servant's existence in the colony:

*I have play'd my part, Both at Plough
and Cart,
In the Land of Virginny, O:
Billets from the Wood, Upon my back
they load,
When that I was weary, weary, weary,
weary, O.
(Bodleian. Douce 2(219a).)*

Indentured servants in the early English colonies of America came from a wide variety of social segments within Britain and Ireland. The majority were voluntary émigrés, free persons who wished to settle on the far side of the Atlantic to better their circumstances but who could not afford the price of passage. Involuntary servants constituted the other large group and included "those sent under the arbitrary exercise of royal prerogative or by court sentences," including outright criminals, paupers, vagrants and dissolute persons, as well as many poor children (Ballagh 1969, 34–35). Included in the latter mix were many political prisoners. Morison (1965, 82) writes,

*"James I began, and Oliver Cromwell
and the later Stuart kings continued, the
business of transporting to the colonies
Scottish and Irish rebels taken in civil
wars... Most of these unfortunates were
sent to the West Indies... but some went to
Virginia, Maryland, and New England."*

Goulding's relocation from Ireland to England and subsequent emigration to America, therefore, could have been by design or through poverty, a result of anti-government activity or because of conviction for a petty crime; but, almost surely, it was related in some way to the large-scale, political and sectarian based land redistribution ongoing in Ireland.



Edward Abbes and William Goulding appear to have had a satisfactory relationship in the vicinity of Elizabeth City near where the James River empties into Chesapeake Bay. In a will signed August 24, 1636, Abbes bequeathed, "To William Goulder, my man, one year and a half of his time in case my wife and child be dead" (Withington 1980, 262). Abbes died shortly afterwards and his wife, Sarah, subsequently returned to England. On May 23, 1637, Sarah Abbes, "presented her late husband's will to probate officials, noting that he had died in Virginia" (McCartney 2007, 77). Whether she remained in Britain or subsequently traveled back to Virginia is not known. Also unresolved is the date on which the Irishman finally became free. The key to that question is the length of his indenture, which could have varied between two and eight years with a three to five-year term considered average (Ballagh 1969, 49–50; Kenny 2000, 9).

According to Father Jogues' biographer, the Irishman reached New Amsterdam from "the Virginia coast" while the Jesuit was awaiting passage to Europe (Martin 1885, 154). Exactly where Goulding resided in the years immediately

prior to his arrival in New Amsterdam is not known. Employment prospects in Virginia were good because labor was very much in demand, but, given the colony's profitable tobacco culture, most men preferred to become freeholders, and land grants were frequently stipulated in contracts between servants and masters (Ballagh 1969, 84–85). Colonial records show that, in 1637, Thomas Weston conveyed land in Charles River Shire¹ to a William Golding (Greer 1912, 130). Perhaps Weston had secured the Irishman's indenture and was then granting him his first piece of real estate in America. What is certain, though, is that in 1641 the Virginia House of Burgesses began a legislative campaign that barred "popish recusants" from holding office and likewise disenfranchised Roman Catholics (Billington 1964, 7). Virginia was quickly turning hostile while Manhattan stood open and accommodating.

IN NEW AMSTERDAM AND NEW YORK

Despite the difficulties he had encountered previously because of his religious beliefs, Goulding did well in New Amsterdam. On June 4, 1644, he² married a widow, Anna Catharyn Smith, in the Dutch Reformed Church (Cook 1996, 236, 247; Purple 1890, 12). The couple had at least four children: William, Joseph, Hester and Nicholas (Riker 1999). On September 15, 1646, he³ purchased the southwest end of Govert Loockermans and Dirck Cornelissen's farm, the land immediately below where the Manhattan anchor of the Brooklyn Bridge now lies (Stokes 1915–28 VI, 117).

Goulding's primary identity in New Amsterdam was that of an Anglophone. At about the same time Father Jogues heard his confession, the Irishman came in contact with one of the more extraordinary women of early colonial America, Lady Deborah Moody, a "woman of considerable wealth and education" from Wiltshire, England (Stockwell 1884, 1). Moody was an Anabaptist who had been admonished by the court in Salem, Massachusetts for opposing the practice of infant baptism, and in June 1643 she and some like-minded followers decided to move to the more liberal New Amsterdam.

Illustration:

Willem Kieft held primary administrative responsibility for New Amsterdam 1638–1647. He granted religious dissenter Lady Deborah Moody and her associates permission to settle Gravesend in 1645. Kieft's relations with Native Americans deteriorated into war, and he was soon succeeded by Peter Stuyvesant. Courtesy of Manhattan.NL

By the letter of the law, New Amsterdam was a Dutch Reformed Church settlement, but because the Netherlands was fairly prosperous, lacked the surplus population of other European countries and, unlike Ireland, was relatively free of religious persecution, the merchant enterprise that operated the outpost had some difficulty in recruiting Dutch nationals as settlers (Kammen 1975, 37–38). Furthermore, the port at the mouth of the Hudson was considered a dreary, undesirable location in comparison to Dutch colonial outposts in the Caribbean and East Indies. For these reasons, the Dutch West India Company showed more toleration towards foreigners in the interest of maintaining an adequate labor force. As a result, New Amsterdam evolved as a special place quite unlike the Anglo-Dissenter habitations of New England and distinct from the feudal Dutch manors to the north along the Hudson River.

Willem Kieft, resident director-general of the Dutch West India Company, granted Lady Deborah permission to settle at Gravesend in present-day Brooklyn. But Kieft had precipitated a war with the surrounding indigenous population, and the Moody party soon scurried back to Manhattan, where residents and newcomers alike huddled for protection beside the walls of Fort Amsterdam—the interior of the fort being too small to shelter all who desired entry (Brodhead 1853 I, 367). A larger English-speaking community then coalesced, and it is likely that Goulding and Moody met at that critical juncture.

Once the war cries abated, Kieft again allowed Moody to settle in Gravesend. On December 19, 1645, he granted the settlement an official patent permitting the formation of a local government and assuring “the free liberty of conscience, according to the custom and manner of Holland, without molestation or disturbance from any magistrate or magistrates or any other ecclesiastical minister that may pretend jurisdiction over them” (Brodhead 1853 I, 411–12).

Lady Deborah and her associates built their houses close together for the purpose of protection from the surrounding natives. The Gravesend town plan contained “a square of sixteen acres surrounded by a street, the ‘Hye-way,’ and cut by two cross-streets with four smaller squares. Each of these quarters was



divided into ten lots, built around a common yard in the center for cattle. The farms, or ‘Planters’ Lots’ as they were called, were triangular, bordering on the street which encompassed the town” (Flint 1896, 110–11). Additional upland and meadowland outside the compound was parceled out to residents according to the number of cattle they raised. William Goulding was an early settler of Gravesend and became a trusted community member. “In May 1663, when John Tilton (Town Clerk) and his wife Mary were forcibly removed out of the Dutch jurisdiction for the crime of being Quakers a special town meeting was held and William Goulding was chosen as his replacement” (Stillwell 1887).

As friction intensified between the colonies of New England and New Netherland, the residents of Gravesend threw in their lot with the forces of the restored Stuart monarchy. On October 8, 1663, Goulding was one of “Eight mounted and well-armed men who went to Jamanica [Jamaica in present-day Queens County]” in revolt. Before leaving Gravesend, they are reported to have called out, “Will you be the King’s or the States’ men?” (Brodhead 1853–87, XIV, 536–37). These were refer-

Illustration:

In contrast to some other Dutch settlements in the seventeenth century, New Amsterdam was considered a relative dreary location—a factor in its openness toward settlers from many backgrounds. This drawing, published in 1908, is intended to show a New Amsterdam street scene in 1644. Courtesy of New York Public Library.

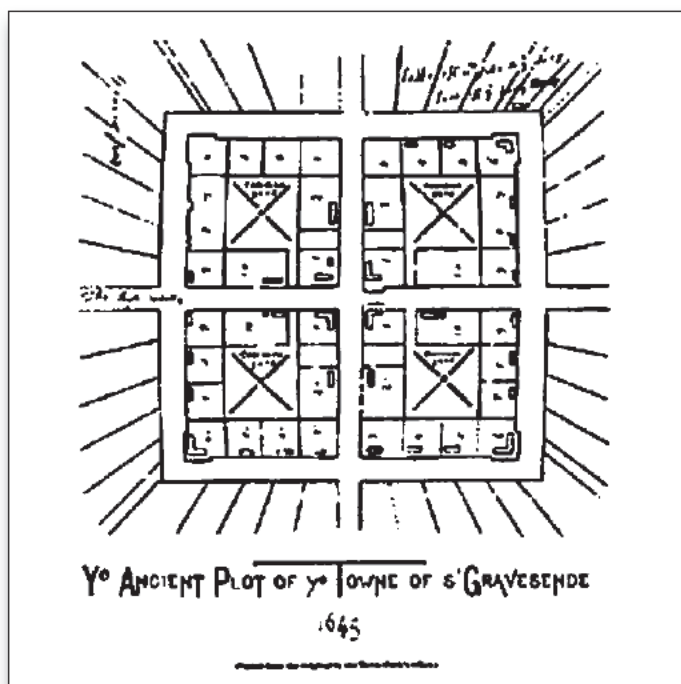


Illustration:
A reproduction of the geographical settlement plan for Gravesend created by Lady Deborah Moody. The town was a planned community, one of the first for Europeans in North America. It was bisected by two main roads and surrounded by a wooden palisade. Under English control in 1683, the town of Gravesend was incorporated into the newly formed Kings County. Courtesy of Annenberg Learner.

ences to Charles II, King of England, and the States-General, ruling body of the Netherlands. Acknowledging that pressure on his colony both from within and without was too great, on November 15, 1663 Director-General Peter Stuyvesant (who had succeeded Kieft) effectively ceded the English towns of Long Island, Gravesend included, to New England (Brodhead 1853 I, 723–24).

Always with a ready eye for property investment, Goulding was one of the approximately twenty men from the towns of Gravesend, Flushing, and Jamaica who in December 1663 “went secretly in a sloop to the Raritan River for the purpose of buying land from the Neversinks and Raritans” (Brodhead 1853–87 I, 724).

During the late summer of the following year, an English fleet sailed into the upper bay surrounding New Amsterdam, leveled its cannon on the Dutch fort, and demanded the surrender of the town. Peter Stuyvesant wisely agreed to terms on September 8, 1664. New Amsterdam was renamed New York after its new proprietor, James Stuart, Duke of York,⁴ and Goulding continued in a position of public trust. In 1673, he⁵ was recorded in New York colonial documents as an ensign of the militia (Brodhead 1853–87 II, 646).

At some point, William and Anna Catharyn parted company, she going to Hempstead⁶ to live with a son by her first husband (Stillwell 1887). The exact cause is not known but the following incidents may well have had some bearing. The Council Minutes of New Amsterdam for February 12, 1642 record “Domine Johannes Megapolensis requests, that Anna Smits⁷ an Anabaptist, should be restrained from using slanderous and calumniating expressions against God’s word and his servants” (Brodhead 1853–87 XIV, 155–56). Ten years later, on May 5, 1652, Anna was found guilty of defaming a fellow villager and was admonished judicially. When a further offence occurred, she was called before the court and convicted again on September 13 (Cook 1996, 237). Anna

was then ordered “to stand in ye yrons half an hour, with a paper on her breast declaring her to be a publick disturber of ye peace, and if any further trouble from her, she to be put out of ye town” (Stockwell 1884, 12).

LOCAL TRADITION

The events laid out thus far are derived from colonial records but what follows is local tradition—oral history lying somewhere between journalism and legend. It is worth repeating mainly because it is not implausible. In 1887 and 1888, the *Kings County Journal* weekly newspaper published a series of articles by William H. Stillwell on the settlement of Gravesend. One of these, preserved in a box of clippings at the library of the *New-York Historical Society* profiles William Goulding, stating that “tradition” holds he returned to Ireland following the Restoration in the hope of receiving a monetary settlement under the Act of Explanation (1665), which granted partial relief to Irish Catholics who had been deprived of lands. The mention is particularly intriguing because the number of the Irishman’s property transactions in America is substantial. On March 14, 1649, for example, he bought

and sold a farm in Gravesend on the same day, and by 1657 he had nine acres of farmland under cultivation in Gravesend (Stillwell 1887). In 1667, he began acquiring acreage in Middletown, New Jersey (Stillwell 1887).

Though the exact date of William Goulding's death is undetermined, Cook (1996, 247) believes he died sometime between 1680 and 1682, quoting a reference made to his estate in court documents dated June 30, 1682.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Though the first image of William Goulding is just a snapshot of a faceless young migrant freshly landed at New Amsterdam's seaport seeking religion as a tonic for his spirit and a salve for his fear, he quickly develops into a more defined figure. Academic inquisitiveness and simple human interest raise questions about the unknown details of his circuitous route to Manhattan Island, while surviving records prove him to be the earliest documented Irish permanent resident in what is now the City of New York.

Estimates of the numbers of Irish who emigrated to America during the seventeenth century range widely from between 50,000 and 100,000, with about three-quarters of the total thought to have been Catholic (Kenny 2000, 7; Miller 1985, 137). But, as Kevin Kenny (2000, 7) writes, "Virtually no evidence has survived on these Catholic settlers.... Mainly young, single, rootless males, they seem to have blended into the general population rather than establishing themselves as a separate ethnic group in America." Goulding's life in New Amsterdam and New York validates that synopsis, and through him can be seen many of the reasons why the seventeenth-century Irish assimilated rather than coalesced. His allure is only enhanced with the understanding that, during his life in America, he was confronted with many of the challenges and choices encountered by early Catholic Irish settlers; yet he survived, prospered, even triumphed.

The concept of exile or banishment from the native land has suffused the literature of Ireland and Irish America for centuries (Miller 1985, 3–8). The word "exile" appears



often in Irish song lyrics and other literature, sometimes with the use of considerable poetic license. In Goulding's case, though, it is entirely clear that he was not a willing immigrant but a true outcast. After first establishing himself in Virginia, he was driven from that new home by a second scheme for religious persecution and land clearance. In cosmopolitan New Amsterdam, he received communion from the mutilated hands of a future saint. However, once Father Jogues departed for France, the Irishman was again on his own, severed from his religion. Catholics, along with other high-church Christians, experience God principally through sacraments delivered by ordained clergy. With little hope of ever again receiving absolution and communion, he faced the prospect of a life of lonely prayer well beyond the reach of the Church. In response, the Irishman chose a path that led to his assimilation into the diverse Protestant population of mercantile New Amsterdam.

Catholic-to-Protestant conversion certainly was no rarity in seventeenth-century Ireland. Setting aside issues of belief, it was a pragmatic solution that diminished the likelihood of persecution, secured the ownership of land, and conserved family wealth. But it was also an extreme measure that represented far more than the acceptance of a foreign

Illustration:

Peter Stuyvesant was selected in 1645 by the Dutch West India Company to succeed Willem Kieft as director of New Netherland. His administration began in 1647 and lasted until 1664 when English warships threatened destruction of New Amsterdam and the Dutch lost the settlement. Stuyvesant lived out his life in New York City. He died in 1672, and his body was entombed in St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery. Courtesy of New York State Archives.



tigated but neither is it farfetched, and it presents an intriguing avenue for further research.

As the known parts of his persona are connected, William Goulding becomes increasingly important. He stands as a rare, identifiable figure entirely consistent with the mass silhouette of thousands of anonymous seventeenth-century Catholic Irish immigrants to America in that he arrived in bondage, that he was harassed for his beliefs, and that his travels took him farther and faster than the ability of his reviled religion to keep pace. In attempting to mitigate his challenges, he adopted many of the ways of his neighbors and in that sense became a prototype New Yorker. Still, regardless of whether Goulding's interest in a settlement under the Act of Explanation was actively pursued or merely imagined, he retained Irishness deeply within his core.

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religion. The act symbolized the embrace of the alien oppressor in full view of one's neighbors, and it embodied the repudiation of the ancient culture, native language and living community. In distant and accommodating New Amsterdam, Goulding felt no such social pressure. In isolation, his decision was simple, natural, and his own. He married in the official Dutch Reformed Church, and he homesteaded and surely worshipped with a group of radical Anglo-Dissenters. While it is a matter of record that his wife was a free-tongued, evangelical Anabaptist preacher, the zeal with which he embraced that religion cannot be determined but his reward was quite clear—broad acceptance in an English-speaking enclave.

William Goulding's literacy, his facility for trading real property, and his leadership in Gravesend public affairs elevated him to a position of respect in a frontier American community that lay perilously close to the European beachhead. His multiple talents suggest he descended from an educated, possibly esteemed, family. The tradition of his return to Ireland following the Restoration in order to settle a property claim has not yet been inves-

Illustration:
The great seal of New Netherland depicted the beaver at its center, representing the importance of the fur trade to the colony and to New Amsterdam. The current great seal of New York City shows the sails of a windmill, two barrels of flour, and two beavers. Courtesy of New York State Education Department.

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Illustration:
Depiction of New Amsterdam as seen in 1651, eight years after arrival of Isaac Jogues in the settlement. This view was first published in Amsterdam in 1671 and may have been based on a drawing by the explorer and cartographer Augustine Herman. Courtesy of Fordham University Libraries and the New Netherland Project.

Endnotes

- 1 Present-day York County, Virginia.
- 2 He married as Wilem Gelder.
- 3 As William Goulder.
- 4 The future King James II.
- 5 As William Golding.
- 6 In present-day Nassau County.
- 7 Smith.