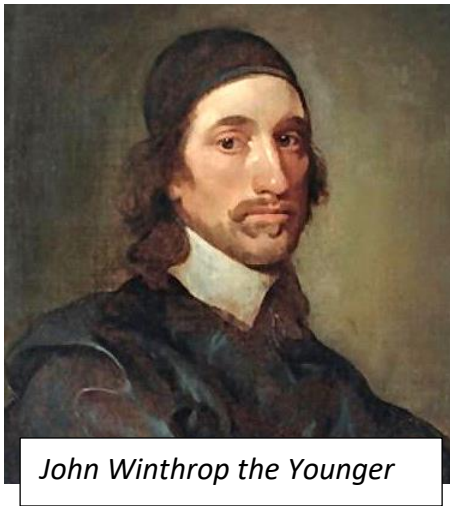


Seabrook and Saybrook and Dutch Mapmaking©

(By Lamar LeMonte OSHS August 2021)

Readers of history should always keep two axioms in mind: “History is written by the victors,” and “History is the story told most often.” Both of these sayings are germane to the naming of Saybrook.

The official Town History is the story told most often. It tells us that almost 390



John Winthrop the Younger

years ago in 1635 Governor John Winthrop Jr. sailed from Plymouth Colony to Saybrook Point and named the settlement in honor of Viscount **Saye & Sele** (yes he had two last names) and Lord **Brooke**, two of the original English patentees. This account may or may not be true. There is no written record of this official designation by Governor Winthrop. But this is definitely the story told most often. It can be found on Wikipedia, on town plaques, the town’s Chamber of Commerce, the Old Saybrook Historical Society, and numerous other “town histories.”

In a 1935 history book published by the Saybrook Tercentenary Committee, the following was asserted, *In 1636 George Fenwick named the settlement Saybrook in honor of Lord Saye and Sele and Lord Brooke.* Again in 1969 the Old Saybrook Chamber of Commerce published a vignette titled *Old Saybrook*, and it stated: *Lieut. Gibbons and twenty men, under Winthrop’s command in 1635, seized Saybrook Point from the Dutch and claimed the Saybrook area in the name of Saye and Sele, and Lord Brooke on November 24, 1635.* How that exact date was determined is unknown.

Despite this oft-repeated story, other historians give the Dutch credit for naming the original settlement **Zeebroeck**. The Dutch, more interested in fur trading than permanent settlements, explored the Connecticut River area in the early 1600’s. Historians claim the Dutch named their earliest outpost at the end of the Connecticut River, Kievetshoeck, and a larger outpost Zeebroeck. This could have been as early as 1620, several years after Adriaen Block’s 1614 survey of the

Connecticut River for the Dutch West India Company and at least 15 years before English Governor John Winthrop reportedly named the settlement **Saye-Brooke**. Once again, there is no written record of these designations so this account may or may not be true. What is true is that the Dutch were not the ultimate victors in this history.

How does an historian try to evaluate the reliability of these different stories? Since almost 400 years have passed, the only way is to examine written records of the day. The late Harold Elrod, retired university professor, Old Saybrook resident, historian, and past president of the Old Saybrook Historical Society, did just that.

Elrod believed that based on written records, **Zeebroeck** or **Seabrook** was the original town name. He correctly noted that Lion Gardiner, the English engineer brought here by Governor Winthrop in 1635 to build a fort, had lived in Holland, spoke Dutch and had a Dutch wife. He believed that Gardiner could not have failed to recognize the original Dutch name **Zeebroeck**, and translated it correctly into English as **Seabrook**.

Seabrook and Zeebroeck are the same name, one spelled in English, the other in Dutch. It is a descriptive name for a settlement, village, or town in close proximity to a river, stream, or estuary that flows into a larger body of water -- a lake, a bay, or a sea. It accurately describes six other coastal American towns named Seabrook. It also accurately describes one English seaside village in Kent named Seabrook, and a coastal port in Holland (now part of Belgium) named Zeebroeck, both in existence in the early 1600's.

Elrod's extensive research also noted numerous written mentions, by Gardiner and others, referring to the inhabitants of **SeaBrooke**, **Fort SeaBrooke** and the town of **Seabrooke** well after 1635, which is when the story-told-most-often claims the town was officially named SayeBrooke.

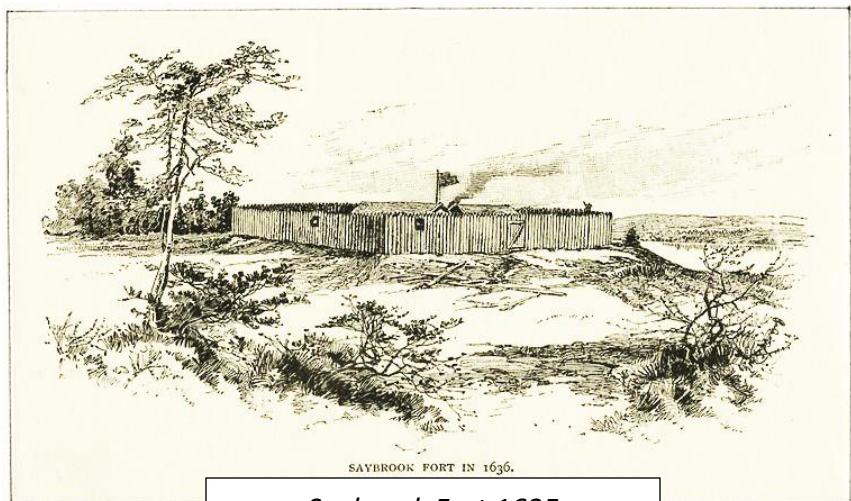


Lieutenant Lion Gardiner

In 1644, nine years after the supposed SayeBrooke naming, the Connecticut Colony purchased from Colonel Fenwick the “jurisdiction right to the colony of **Seabrooke**” These 1644 Articles of Agreement refer numerous times to **SeaBrooke Fort, ye Fort att Seabrooke** and the **town of Sea Brooke**. (Col. George Fenwick was the only one of the original patentees to ever visit the colony)

In 1659, 24 years later, a large number of parishioners petitioned the court to allow them to follow their pastor to Norwich. The court lists the petition signers as **"the inhabitants of Seabrook."**

Elrod cited that in 1660, 25 years later, when Lion Gardiner (builder of the fort at Saybrook Point) transmitted his history of the Pequot Wars with a letter, he writes the following: *To call to mind the passages of God's providence at **Seabrooke**, in and about the time of the Pequot war.*



SAYBROOK FORT IN 1636.

Saybrook Fort 1635
Source: New York Public Library

His attached history then states in the first paragraph, *I made an agreement with Mr. Peters, for four years to serve the company of patentees, namely, the Lord Say, and the Lord Brooke*. Elrod points out that despite the different spelling of the name Say, Gardiner showed no intent to associate the name of the town with the names of its principal patentees.

In 1662, 27 years later, the ferry between Saybrook and Lyme was established. The proceedings of the General Court for that year state: *This court grants **Sea Brooke Inhabitants** liberty to set up a ferry at Tilleyes Point.*

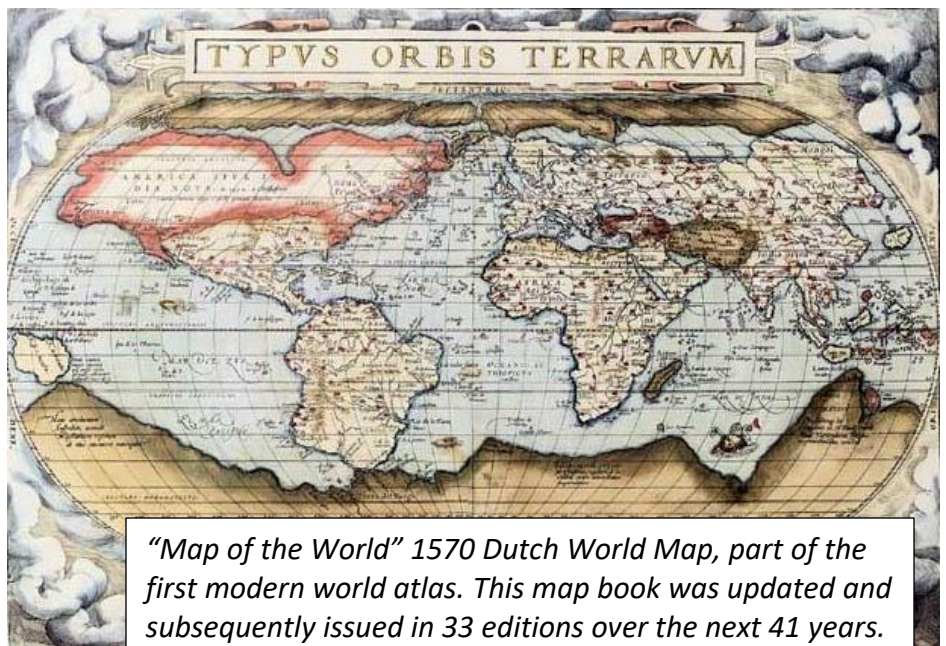
And in 1675, 40 years after the SayeBrooke naming, the town was the scene of an attack by Dutch Governor Andross, of New Amsterdam (New York City), to take possession of a fort and town **"at a place called Seabrook."**

Harold Elrod shared his research with historian Ellsworth Grant, the husband of fellow historian Marion Hepburn Grant. In all likelihood they met and conversed at one of the Hepburn homes in Fenwick. Grant found Elrod's arguments for **Zeebroeck/Seabrook**, "persuasive and the evidence convincing." In 1991, Elrod wrote in a letter to Grant, "I am very pleased that you find my arguments persuasive for the Dutch origin of our town's name. However, though the evidence may be convincing, it is not conclusive." Elrod's equivocation may have had to do with the famous 1650 Dutch map which was the first known map to designate Zeebroeck as the town name.

Dutch Mapmaking

The 1600's were the golden age of Dutch exploration and Dutch mapmaking. Two huge Dutch enterprises were drivers of this age, the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company. For almost 200 years, the Dutch dominated world trade. It was the Dutch West India Company that sponsored the explorations of both Englishman Henry Hudson and Dutchman Adriaen Block along the northeastern coast of America.

Back in Europe, these explorations were celebrated in maps and atlases. Publishing an atlas was akin to publishing a best-seller. Both literate and illiterate Europeans were fascinated by the ever-increasing discoveries of new lands. They were also keenly interested in which European empire was claiming these new lands as their own. Publishers working with engravers went to great lengths to make new maps colorful, informative, accurate and up to date.



"Map of the World" 1570 Dutch World Map, part of the first modern world atlas. This map book was updated and subsequently issued in 33 editions over the next 41 years.

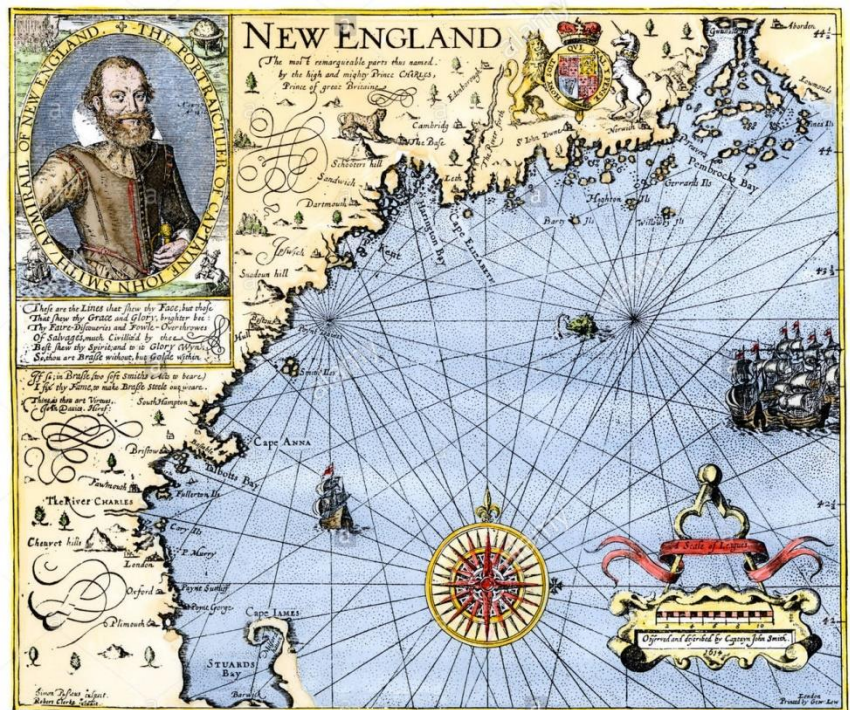
This meant that the map's original engraving plate was revised time after time, adding or editing names and places, either as new lands were explored or as one nation supplanted another in territorial ownership.

For the maps of New England, European cartographers and their engravers relied on surveys done by voyagers such as Henry Hudson, Andriaen Block, and John Smith not only for the geography, which was quite accurate for its time, but also for the names of places. Quite often, however, the particular name on a map was based on which mapmaker made the map. This was typical for many maps published in Europe.

For instance, a German mapmaker named both South and North America after the Italian explorer-geographer Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512). This was 15 years after Columbus had mapped part of North America in 1492. The mapmaker later apologized to Columbus and removed the name America from later editions of his map. But it was too late. Mercator and other European engravers had begun using the name and it became the accepted name of the two continents.

On the other hand, English Captain John Smith (of Jamestown settlement fame in 1607), arbitrarily populated his map of New England with names from England. Six years before the Pilgrims landed, Smith had mapped the New England coast in his effort to promote the colonies back in England. The names, Smith acknowledged, were purely fanciful, and designed to suggest to English citizens the potential

for the new world, where they might want to invest or decide to immigrate. Upon his return to England, he invited his friend, heir apparent Prince Charles, to rename the locations as he saw fit, and the prince did rename many of them.



SMITH'S MAP OF NEW ENGLAND

Mapmakers were also influenced by which country was claiming the newly discovered land. In Connecticut, it was primarily a choice between Dutch and English names. But this was further complicated because many early explorers, both Dutch and English, first used the indigenous-Indians' name for many locales. The Indian names Manhattan, Massachusetts and Connecticut are prime examples. Located between English colonial Boston and Dutch colonial New Amsterdam, Connecticut was in the middle of this linguistic tug-of-war, and mapmakers often had to choose between two sets of names.

A Dutchman named Adriaen Cornelissen van der Donck played a key role in the famous 1650 map that listed Zeebroeck as the town's name. His influence on the map may have been one of the reasons for Harold Elrod's lack of conviction about Zeebroeck being the first name.

Adriaen van der Donck

In 1629 the Dutch West India Company gave permission to a number of individuals to help populate their colony of New Netherland. The colony covered parts of present-day Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. Van der Donck was one of those individuals. He was a leader of political life in New Amsterdam and an activist for government reform of the Dutch West India Company's fur trading post there. He was granted an enormous estate (over 24,000 acres) just north of Manhattan Island. The estate was so large that locals referred to him as the Jonkheer ("young gentleman" or "squire"), a word from which the name "Yonkers" is derived. Early Dutch maps of Connecticut relied heavily on the many names recorded by him.



He not only studied the records of the explorations of Henry Hudson and Adriaen Block, he also made his own detailed accounts of the surrounding lands, Indian languages, vegetation, animals, waterways, topography and climate. He used this knowledge to promote immigration to the colony, much like John Smith had done for England in 1614.

He published an influential work entitled, *Description of New Netherland*. Historians have called it, *The fullest account of the province, its geography, the Indians who inhabited it, and its prospects. It has been said that had it not been written in Dutch, it would have gone down as one of the great works of American colonial literature.*

He also wrote a shorter description of the colony entitled, *Remonstrance of New Netherland*. This pamphlet was an enthusiastic description of the land and he used it back in Holland as a sales brochure. Historians claim it created much excitement about New Netherland. So many were suddenly eager to immigrate that ships were forced to turn away paying passengers. A Dutch West India Company director wrote, "Formerly New Netherland was never spoken of, and now heaven and earth seem to be stirred up by it and everyone tries to be the first in selecting the best pieces [of land] there."

The famous map

To go alongside the *Remonstrance*, van der Donck commissioned the famous Jansson-Visscher map of the colony. The map was a compendium of names gathered by van der Donck and others, from numerous sources over several decades. It included many of the 1609

designations of Henry Hudson and the 1611 and 1613 designations of Adriaen Block. It was the first map to designate Zeebroeck as the town's name, next to the original Dutch designation of Saybrook Point as Kievitshoek.



But the map was not published until 1650, by which time many English town names were already established in Connecticut. As a result, many names are originally English but spelled in Dutch, while others are the original Dutch designations. What cannot be determined with certainty is whether the mapmaker translated the English name Seabrook to Zeebroeck, or the opposite. This may have been why Harold Elrod confessed that his argument for the origin of the town name being Dutch was, “not conclusive.”



This section of the Dutch map shows Lange Eylandt, (Long Island), and Adriaen Blocks Eylandt, (Block Island) which the Dutch named. It also shows a misspelled Garners Eylandt, (Gardiner’s Island) which Lion Gardiner named. Along the Connecticut coast it names the Ct River, Varsee (fresh) River. The English-named coastal towns are spelled Stamford, Milfort, Nieuhaven, Gilfort and Zeebroeck. Was the original English spelling of Seabrook translated into Dutch, Zeebroeck, or the opposite?

The map was color engraved by Johannes Blaeu and designed in such a way that it would appear visually appealing. It showed the original Dutch territorial claim from just south of the Delaware Bay to New England and beyond. The map itself remained the definitive depiction of the area for over a century, cementing many Dutch place names. It would be updated, revised and reprinted thirty-one times before the mid-1700’s.

Like most of history, the names on early maps of New England do not tell a clear-cut story. Dutch maps continued to designate the town name as Zeebroeck and English maps continued with the spelling, Seabrook. However by the late 1600’s some English maps also designated the town as Saybrook. And other maps, some English, some French, spelled the town Suybroc, Sherbrook, and Seybrook. Not until the late 1700’s did most maps consistently designate the town as Saybrook, and by the 1800’s the name Seabrook had disappeared from almost all maps.

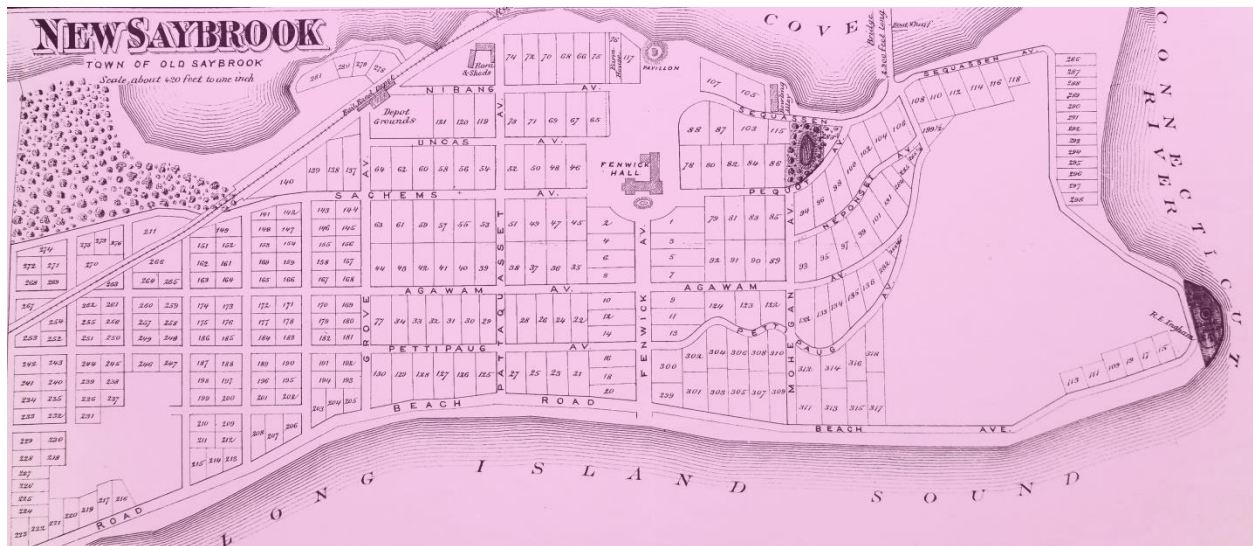
Conclusion

The preponderance of evidence, based on the earliest letters and the earliest maps, both in English and Dutch, suggests that the very first name of the town was Seabrook, spelled either in English or in Dutch. Some have speculated that Seabrook was typically pronounced as Saybrook in the 1600's and that was why that spelling began to appear on those early maps. But that is conjecture.

By the late 1700's and certainly by the 1800's, the name Saybrook most likely prevailed because the coincidence of Viscount Saye and Lord Brooke was a good local story worth telling. The mention of the two Englishmen also eliminated any historical reference to the Dutch heritage of the area --- a reminder that history is written by the victors, and the English were the victors here, not the Dutch.

A footnote

In 1854 the original Saybrook Colony (once encompassing Lyme, Old Lyme, Killingworth, Essex, Chester, Clinton, Deep River and Westbrook) was further divided when Essex became its own town. **Old Saybrook** then became the official town name. **New Saybrook** was a name invented by the New Saybrook Company for selling building lots for summer cottages in what is now the Borough of Fenwick. But the name New Saybrook was only popular on an early 1870 map (below) and some assorted sales pamphlets and stock certificates of the New Saybrook Company. It was never the official name of Fenwick.



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