

[Home](#) > [Top News](#) > [Long Island](#)

Long Island's oldest land deed sold for \$156,000

BY BILL BLEYER | bill.bleyer@newsday.com 2:34 PM EDT, October 31, 2007

A document described as the oldest surviving land deed for Long Island land was auctioned Wednesday for \$156,000 in Manhattan.

The deed, signed by Dutch Colonial Gov. Wouter von Twiller at "Eylandt Manhatans" on June 6, 1636, confirms the purchase of 3,600 acres from the Lenape Indians. The land is known as Keskachauge, and constitutes a large portion of present day Brooklyn. The winning bid was more than three times predicted, and for almost four times the opening bid of \$40,000.

"It is without question one of the oldest Dutch documents in private hands," said Jeremy Markowitz, head of Americana sales at [Bloomsbury Auctions](#), a Manhattan auction house where the sale took place. "It is the first deed for land on Long Island."

Markowitz describes the deed as one of the earliest examples of private land ownership in the colony controlled by the Dutch West India Company.

"It is amazing it survived, being over 370 years old and preceding the first private land ownership in Manhattan."

Markowitz said the deed was signed a dozen years after the founding of the Dutch colony by von Twiller, the successor to the first and better known governor, Peter Minuit.

"We know from the records of the Dutch West India Company who received land deeds," Markowitz said. "There are only about a dozen land deeds that preceded this one" and they are for tracts north or south of present day New York City.

The 13-by-18-inch document, written in ink in Dutch, confirms the purchase of the land in the Flatlands section of Brooklyn from the Indians by Wolfert Gerritsz van Couwenhoven and Andries Hudde.

The auction catalog carries a price estimate of \$50,000 to \$75,000 but auction organizer Markowitz said that range was very conservative and there has been a lot of interest from institutions and private collectors.

On the reverse side, there is a reaffirmation of the original transaction in 1658 and signature of another more famous governor, Peter Stuyvesant, who amended it to say the sole owner of the property was Kouwenhoven. The endorsement was a result of the proclamation by the Dutch West India Company in 1652 that annulled all private land purchases and took all the land back

[Home](#) > [Top News](#) > [Long Island](#)

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"It came from a private collector," Markowitz said. It has been auctioned several times after being held by the Kouwenhoven family for centuries.

The document has minor soiling and a small hole affecting two words where the deed is dated. The text reads:

"We, director and council of New Netherland, residing on the island of Manhattan at Fort Amsterdam herewith testify and declare, that today, date underwritten, before us personally appeared Tenkirau, Ketaun, Ararikan, Awackouw, Warinckehinck, Wappittawackenis, Ehetin, as owners; Penhawis, Kakappeteno being present as chiefs of the district, have transferred, ceded, surrendered and conveyed as lawful, true and free possession, as they therewith transfer, cede, surrender and convey to and for the behalf of Andries Hudde and Wolphert Gerritsz the westernmost of the flats called Keskateuw belonging to them on the island called Suan Hacky between the bay of the North river and the East River of New Netherland"

According to Markowitz, on June 6, 1636, Wolfert Gerretse Van Kouwenhoven and Andries Hudde purchased jointly the 3,600 acres. The same day Jacobus Van Corlear bought an adjoining tract, and 10 days later a third was purchased.

Together, these three tracts in present day Brooklyn constituted an area called 'Castuteeuw,' 'Kestateuw' and 'Casteteuw.'" The name is thought to be derived from the Lenape word for "where grass is cut."

The catalog notes "the sale of these lots was a significant event and constitutes among the earliest examples of private land ownership in New Netherland. At the time, it was highly unusual for land to be owned by anyone except the Dutch West India Company." And most land was leased rather than sold.

Colonial records show the first private purchase of land in the colony of New Netherland occurred in 1629, in present day Delaware. The 1636 purchases collectively are the seventh purchase of land in New Netherland, and the third in the present state of New York. The first private land sale on the island of Manhattan was recorded two years later.

Corlear purchased the land for speculation but Gerritsz van Kouwenhoven settled on the westernmost of the three plots and constructed a dwelling and laid out a plantation that eventually became the settlement and town of Flatlands. The pioneer called his estate Achterveldt and his dwelling stood near the junction of Kouwenhoven Place and Flatbush Avenue.