



## (Auto)biographies & Memoirs

Dutch citizens began immigrating to America around 1620; about 3% of the current U.S. population of 300 million can claim (partial) Dutch origin. Some became famous and had biographers write about them, some wrote their own stories.

**Edward W. Bok**, *The Americanization of Edward Bok: The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years Later*

(Scribner's Sons, 1924). The autobiography of a young Dutch immigrant from Texel, who became the most prominent publisher of his day as editor of Ladies' Home Journal. Bok played a major role in the dissemination of Dutch art and history in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. Along with Franklin Delano Roosevelt and others, Mr. Bok was a co-founder of the NAF in 1921.

**Abraham Pais**, *A Tale of Two Continents—A Physicist's Life in A Turbulent World*

(Princeton Univ. Press, 1997). Pais survived Nazi-occupation of the Netherlands in hiding and immigrated after WWII to the U.S. where, as one of the world's leading theoretical physicists, he joined the Institute of Advanced Studies. There he worked with Einstein, Bohr, Oppenheimer, and Von Neumann, until he joined Rockefeller University.

**Cornelis van Minnen**, *Hendrik Willem van Loon: Popular Historian, Journalist and FDR Confidant*

(Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). Van Loon was among the most well-known American Dutchmen, author of popular history books, radio commentator, publicist and bon vivant on several continents. When FDR occupied the White House, Van Loon was one of FDR's confidants. In the 1930-1940 period, Van Loon divided his time between New York, Greenwich, CT and Veere, the Netherlands. (Also published in Dutch as *Amerika's Beroemdste Nederlander. Een Biografie van Hendrik Willem van Loon* (Boom Publishers, 2005). Van Loon's works are also readily available.

**Peter Collier with David Horowitz**, *The Roosevelts-An American Saga*, Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Claes Martenszen van Rosenvelt left the Netherlands around 1621 and set sail for the New World. Claes had one son, Nicholas (1658-1742), whose offspring included Johannes (later John, 1689-1750) and Jacobus (later James, 1692-1776) who, respectively, founded the Oyster Bay and Hyde Park branches of the family. John's great-grandson Theodore (1858-1919) became the 26<sup>th</sup> president of the United States in 1901, while James's great-grandson Franklin (and thus Theodore's cousin) served as the 32<sup>nd</sup> from 1933 through 1945. Franklin married to Eleanor, Theodore's niece. While hundreds (thousands?) of books have been written about presidents Teddy (TR) and Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), as well as Eleanor Roosevelt, this book is about the Roosevelt family. TR was a Republican, hunter and outdoorsman, renaissance man and prolific reader and author, while FDR was a Democrat with no great intellectual passions but with a strong attachment to Dutchess County. Both liked sailing, lived near the water, and served as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. A good read about the remarkable mark one family left on American society.



**John Niven, *Martin van Buren-The Romantic Age of American Politics*, Oxford Univ Press, 1983.**

From the flap: “They called him the Magician, the Red Fox, and other names that celebrated his political skill. And indeed, there is no doubt that Martin van Buren was the most innovative politician of his age...Niven reveals a man who was preeminently as statesman—not just a superb practitioner of the art of the possible, as he is commonly depicted. First prominent in New York politics, Van Buren served as administration, he was Jackson’s most influential advisor. He own presidency (1837-1841) was beset by the worst depression the United States had yet faced, but as Niven shows, Van Buren met crisis with courage. His corrective measures incensed the financial community but saved the public credit. Defeated in the 1840 election, he was denied the Democratic nomination, for opposing, on moral grounds the immediate annexation of Texas. In 1848, as the presidential candidate for the anti-slavery Free Soil Party, he again lent his name to an unpopular cause he felt was right”.

**Ted Widmer, *Martin van Buren*, Times Books/Henry Holt & Co, 2005.**

Van Buren served as the 8<sup>th</sup> president, grew up speaking Dutch in Kinderhook, NY, before establishing himself as a powerful country lawyer in Claverack, NY. Van Buren rose to become a U.S. Senator at age 29, then New York governor, U.S. Secretary of State and Vice President under President Andrew Jackson, and President (1837-1841). The economic depression in during his presidency cost him his re-election, but not before he introduced far-reaching democratic reforms. He put Kinderhook on the map by initialing his memos and correspondence with O.K. (“Old Kinderhook”).

**Edward Renehan, *Commodore: The Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, Basic Books, 2007**

Cornelius Vanderbilt great-great-great-grandfather, Jan Aertsen, was a Dutch farmer from the village of de Bilt in the province of Utrecht, in the Netherlands, who immigrated to New Netherland in 1650. Cornelius was born on Staten Island, quit school at 11 to start working on the waterfront. After borrowing some money from his mother, at the age of 16 he began ferrying passengers between Manhattan and Staten Island. During the War of 1812, he supplied the forts around New York sailing schooners, hence the name Commodore Vanderbilt. In 1818, Vanderbilt switched to steamships and built a profitable business between New Brunswick, New Jersey and Manhattan, while his wife Sophia operated a profitable inn and tavern near the New Jersey mooring. Later, a steamship service between Manhattan and Albany was added and by 1840 Vanderbilt had 100m steamships operating in the waters around New York and ventured onto the cross-Atlantic market. In the 1860s, Vanderbilt redeployed his capital into railroads and acquired the New York and Harlem, Hudson River and New York Central Railroads, and was instrumental in building the original Grand Central Terminal. Vanderbilt’s aim to control railroad traffic west of New York was thwarted by Jay Gould, then in control of the Erie Railroad. After the Commodore’s son William Vanderbilt gained control of Western Union, another battle erupted between the Vanderbilts and the Goulds when Gould started the American Telegraph Company. Both Cornelius and William were ruthless businessmen, the original “robber barons”. Nonetheless, they were amongst the first to engage in large-scale philanthropy as Cornelius gave much of his fortune (some \$100 million at his death in 1877, roughly equivalent to \$150 billion today) to charity, including the initial endowment for Vanderbilt University.