European Settlement (Background Information for Teacher)

Europeans began to explore the region between the Hudson and Delaware rivers at the beginning of the 16th century, but none settled there until 1624. That year, the Dutch West India Company sent some 30 families to live and work in a tiny settlement on “Nutten Island” (today’s Governors Island) that they called New Amsterdam. In 1626, the settlement’s governor general, Peter Minuit, purchased the much larger Manhattan Island from the natives for 60 guilders in trade goods such as tools, farming equipment, cloth and wampum (shell beads). Fewer than 300 people lived in New Amsterdam when the settlement moved to Manhattan. But it grew quickly, and in 1760 the city, now called New York City, after the English Duke of York, had a population of 18,000 and over took Boston to become the second-largest city in the American colonies.