

**For Immediate Release**

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**BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY PURCHASES RARE 17th CENTURY DEED THAT SHEDS LIGHT ON EARLY HISTORY OF MUSLIMS IN BROOKLYN**

*1643 document grants approximately 200 acres of land near today’s Coney Island to the first known person of Muslim origin in the Americas*

*Acquisition significantly enriches Brooklyn Historical Society’s collections and major public history and*

 *art initiative “Muslims in Brooklyn”*

(November 13, 2019) Brooklyn, NY – At a recent sale at Christie’s auction house, Brooklyn Historical Society (BHS) purchased an extraordinary 375-year-old treasure, a document that underscores the long history of Muslims in Brooklyn and invites a fascinating glimpse into life in Dutch New Netherland in the 1600s with its mix of races, ethnicities, nationalities, and religions.

The lot, described in Christie’s catalogue as **“Granting ‘Anthony the Turk’ land in Brooklyn, Willem Kieft, 27 May 1643,”** is a land deed signed by Willam Kieft (1598-1647), Director-General of New Netherland. It grants Anthony Jansen van Salee (1607–1667), otherwise known as “Anthony the Turk,” 100 morgens of land (approximately 200 acres) on the South shore of Brooklyn. Adding to its unique value is the signature on the reverse side of Peter Stuyvesant (1592–1672), the last Dutch Director-General of the colony of New Netherland. A grant from the B.H. Breslauer Foundation made the acquisition possible.

Anthony Jansen Van Salee’s journey to Brooklyn and his role as the first known person of Muslim origin to settle in America is a story that fires the imagination. His father, Jan Jansen, was a Dutch privateer who married a Moorish woman in Cartagena, Spain. Anthony was their fourth son. In 1618 Jan Jansen was captured by one of the Moorish states along the Barbary coast. During his captivity in Algiers, Jan Jansen reportedly converted to Islam, possibly by force. Renamed Admiral Murat Reis, he became one of the famed Barbary pirates. During this time, Jansen moved his family to Salé, then Algiers, then Amsterdam.

At the end of 1629, a 22 year-old Anthony set sail for the New World from Amsterdam. With him was his new wife, Grietje Reyniers, a 27 year-old woman of German descent. By 1638, the couple had established a *bouwery* (farm) just north of the city wall at Wall Street. A year later, they would enter into a series of legal disputes with significant ramifications in a small community in which justice was often determined by personal connections, accusations, and slander. Ultimately, the couple was given six months to leave New Amsterdam forever.

Yet a short time later, Anthony was able to secure a grant of 100 morgens of land near present-day Coney Island. Anthony and Grietje left New Amsterdam for land that would eventually become Brooklyn, where they established themselves as one of the most prosperous landowning families in the area. The couple had several daughters, who went on to marry into prominent merchant families. Many old New York families, including Vanderbilts, trace their lineage back to the Van Salees.

“This rare and remarkable document enhances Brooklyn Historical Society’s extensive collection of 17th-century manuscripts, and it reveals the remarkable diversity among the earliest settlers of the Dutch frontier that is today Brooklyn,” notes Julie Golia, Vice President for Curatorial Affairs and Collections at Brooklyn Historical Society. “Anthony van Salee’s land deed is an entry point into essential themes – race, religion, gender, and law – that mark Brooklyn’s history across centuries, making this almost 400-year-old artifact relevant to scholars, students, museumgoers, and many more.”

“Beginning in 2017, Brooklyn Historical Society launched an important initiative called *Muslims in Brooklyn*, a public art and history project to amplify stories of Brooklyn’s diverse Muslim communities. The Van Salee land deed is a powerful addition to the history of Muslims that we have been telling,” observes Deborah Schwartz, President of Brooklyn Historical Society. “We have an opportunity here to connect the stories of 20th and 21st-century Muslims to a little-known and complex story from the 17th century. We know that scholars will be eager to work with this early evidence of Muslims in Brooklyn, and we especially look forward to sharing the document with the public in the months ahead.”

The document will be on display at Brooklyn Historical Society from Wednesday, December 11 through Sunday, December 15, 2019. Brooklyn Historical Society is located at 128 Pierrepont Street. Public hours are Wednesday through Sunday, noon to 5:00 pm. For more information visit [www.brooklynhistory.org](http://www.brooklynhistory.org).

About Brooklyn Historical Society

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post and opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach. In May 2017 BHS opened a second site in DUMBO’s Brooklyn Bridge Park.

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