

# **Margaret Hardenbroeck**

**1637-1691**

Margaret Hardenbroeck was a smart, courageous, and hard-working business woman. In the 17th century, when it was uncommon for women to take on roles outside of the household, she defied expectations and, later, the law, to become the wealthiest woman in the world.

**Commemorative Essay by Nadia Fassa, Tarrytown  
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## Margaret Hardenbroeck

Margaret Hardenbroeck, who was also known as Margaret Philipse, was a woman with business acumen, finesse, and intuition at a time when women were defined solely by their domestic roles. While her own name may not be considered prominent today, Hardenbroeck can be considered a feminist icon and she played a huge role in helping her second husband, Frederick Philipse, obtain his wealth. Margaret Hardenbroeck should be included in the Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow Historic Hall of Fame because although she was a woman, which gave her disadvantages under British law, she conducted her own business ventures, managed her own wealth and advanced the wealth of her husband, which led to the couple becoming the richest man and woman of the 17th century.

Hardenbroeck was born in 1637 in Amsterdam, Holland to a German immigrant. Although not much is known about her childhood, it is likely she would have received an education due to Holland being the only country in Europe to advocate for women's education. This factor likely contributed to Hardenbroeck's strong sense of professionalism later in her life.

In her early 20's, Hardenbroeck moved to New Amsterdam to work as a *factor* for her cousin. Being a factor meant she was to manage her cousin's New World dealings, which was essentially an employee who traded select merchandise in exchange for a commission. Although Margaret did not stay a *factor* for long, her early experience in trade certainly set the stage for her later business ventures and attainment of wealth.

Hardenbroeck would soon marry her first husband, Peter de Vries, a wealthy merchant with whom she had a daughter, Eva. Hardenbroeck continued to work under her own name through her marriage, which ended when de Vries died in 1661. She inherited his vast estate, which included a fleet of ships. She managed this wealth all by herself and grew it by buying new ships of her own and sailing them as her own super cargo. With this, Hardenbroeck was growing into a highly successful and wealthy merchant, trading goods such as fur. She herself owned real estate, spanning from what is currently the state of New York to Barbados. She was dubbed as a 'she-merchant', a term often used to describe the few women who participated in trade. This set Hardenbroeck on the path to becoming the wealthiest woman in the world.

In 1662, Hardenbroeck married Frederick Philipse, a successful merchant who later became wealthy in his own right, although at first she brought wealth into their union. This, in the beginning, worked out for Hardenbroeck because New Amsterdam was under Dutch Law, which gave her rights to land and wealth, rather than living under her husband's rule.

This later became more difficult, as New Amsterdam fell under British Rule. Although many women were stripped of their rights, Hardenbroeck continued to run her business and manage her own wealth, for by this point she had built what could be called an empire. She was unstoppable and was, at the time, considered the pinnacle of female achievement. When Hardenbroeck passed away in 1691, she was the richest woman in the world and had long retired from her business ventures.

While Hardenbroeck was rich and had a sense of business acumen, which is important in its own right, her achievements are especially important because she did them as a woman. While she mothered her children well, left them with a good deal of inheritance, and passed her sense of professionalism onto them, her life was never defined by her role in the household. She went on to create a story for herself, which represents female empowerment. She defied expectations, standards, and even the law to continue her business practices. For her sheer determination and inspiring qualities, Margaret Hardenbroeck deserves a spot in the Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow Hall of Fame.

### **Works Cited**

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