



Cover photo- Will Earley portraying  
Diederik Leertouwer at the Leertouwer  
gravesite, Old Indian Cemetery  
West Brookfield, MA

Prepared for the 2009 Asparagus and Flower Heritage Festival  
By the West Brookfield Historical Commission  
[www.westbrookfield.org](http://www.westbrookfield.org)



*The Legend of  
Diederik Leertouwer  
and Asparagus in  
New England*

Appointment of Diederik Leertouwer

National Archives- Washington, DC

The States General of the United Netherlands. To all who see, hear or read this, greetings. For your information: We have come to the realization that it might be very useful and valuable for the commerce and shipping of our country, and also for the expansion of commerce with the United States of America, that we appoint a capable and experienced person as consul for the provinces of New Hampshire and Massachusetts Bay, to be residing at Boston. Thus, after receiving positive recommendations about Diederik Leertouwer, and completely relying on his competence and zeal we appoint and commission the same Diederik Leertouwer as consul for Dutch commerce and shipping in the provinces of New England and Massachusetts Bay. To reside in Boston and act with complete power and authority, especially with jurisdiction to represent and favor the commercial agents of this country in the legal trade (with the USA), and to assist as best as possible the ships from this country that might dock there, and also to protect and safeguard the ship's crews and cargoes and specifically to see to it that the rights and privileges of the subjects of the United Dutch Republic will be respected, as guaranteed to this nation, especially those specified in the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce agreed to on 7 October 1782, of which he will receive a printed copy. These provisional and general instructions have been approved in today's session, and he (Leertouwer) will receive a copy of the commission's appointment to conduct himself according to its instructions. In order to assure faithful discharge of his duties, Diederik Leertouwer will be required to take the oath, either here or in absentia. After this is done, we recommend to each person to whom this might apply to recognize and respect the afore named Diederik Leertouwer as consul in the provinces of New Hampshire and Massachusetts Bay, and residing in Boston. Requesting from each and everyone to support and assist him in carrying out his duties and mission, which we here consider customary and a service to this country.

Enacted in the Hague and with the seal of the state, initialed by the honorable presiding officer at our session and with the signature of our secretary on the seventeenth of September of the year 1784.

W.C.H. van Lynden L.S.: As ordered by the High and Mighty Lords of the States-General H. Fagel

(This is a translation of an original document recently discovered in archives in the Netherlands)

*Diederick Leertouwer came to this country in 1784 to promote trade between the Netherlands and New England. He arrived in Boston and later settled with his wife and daughter in West Brookfield where he carried out his duties as Consul. He lived here between the years 1794 and 1798. At that time, West Brookfield had a population greater than Worcester and was being considered for the county seat.*

*Local legend has it that Diederik Leertouwer imported asparagus from his homeland and was the first to plant it in this area. This fact was forgotten until it was discovered in an old cookbook. Wild asparagus still grows in this area today. Many claim to have the original patch.*

*Leertouwer died here and is buried in the Old Indian Cemetery on Cottage St., West Brookfield.*

His Gravestone Inscription reads:

*"In memory of the honorable Diederik Leertouwer, Esq.  
Late consul of their high mightinesses,  
The States general of the United Netherland  
For the States of Massachusetts and New Hampshire  
Who departed this life  
August 24, 1798 AE 38 years.  
Death! Great proprietor of all, thy powerful sway,  
destroys alike the old, the young, the grave and gay."*