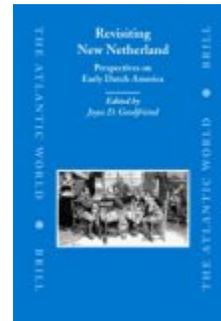


H-Net Reviews

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Joyce Goodfriend, ed. *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America*. The Atlantic World: Brill, 2005. xiv + 346 pp. \$179.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-14507-8.

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New Netherland: History's Debutante?

In academic circles, the history of the New Netherland colony squats awkwardly between two historiographic traditions. From the perspective of Dutch history, the colony was an expensive and embarrassing failure, best swept into history's dustbin. From the perspective of American colonial history, it was a brief hiccup in the more-or-less unbroken trend of British imperial dominance in North America. The stated purpose of *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America* is to address critically the latter perspective by challenging the Anglo-centric bias in U.S. colonial history, and to create a place within its discursive space for people and activities outside of the British sphere of influence. Joyce Goodfriend, the editor of the volume, suggests that its several articles serve this common purpose by staking a claim for the significance of the short-lived colony of New Netherland to the grand narrative of American colonial history. Taken collectively, the articles in the volume more subtly suggest that the study of New Netherland is a field emerging from its historiographic liminality and one which is on the verge of attaining a new level of independent, scholarly maturity, free of the shadows of national histories. By the end of the book, these lofty goals remain an aspiration rather than an accomplishment, but the potential for future research is brought into sharper focus.

Similar to other volumes in this series (Brill's Atlantic World series), *Revisiting New Netherland* serves not only as an overview of current work in the history of New Netherland, but also as a snapshot of a field of history that is functionally different from many others. The his-

toriography, for example, can be mastered in a dedicated summer, as the bibliographies and citations in the volume attest. Rather than having to jostle and jockey for position around hundreds or even thousands of claims on historical understanding, the researcher of New Netherland's history has the creative space to construct history from the ground floor, but with much of the laborious legwork involved in gathering the building blocks already completed. Thanks to this volume, the gaps to be filled are all the more apparent and the sources to fill them readily identified and located. Even for those with no previous interest in New Netherland, the book inspires simply because the field appears like a single ripe fruit dangling from a low-hanging tree branch.

Until recently, much of the history of the New Netherland had been done by local historians and independent scholars, especially New Yorkers, interested in exploring their own past. Interesting books have been written, for example, about the architecture of homes and decorative arts, and, above all, about genealogy. Two articles in the present volume address the latter. The first, by Henry Macy, Jr. (editor of the *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*), provides an overview of the work that has been accomplished and points readers to the primary resources for locating genealogical information and to the journals that publish current research. The second, by Firth Haring Fabend, is replete with suggestions of how the genealogical research could potentially be put to productive use by historians. Fabend notes numerous opportunities, especially in the historical interpretation of family life, gender, and sexuality in

the fledgling colony. Several other articles also serve a similar function as a blueprint for researchers. Archivist Charles Gehring, for years a driving force behind New Netherland studies and executive director of the New Netherland Institute, contributes a guide to the location and condition of all extant records, with attention paid to their usefulness. Finally, David William Voorhees' aptly titled article, "Tying the Loose Ends Together," shows how the historiography of the field has recently come to greater prominence in the hands of a scattered band of university scholars. By pulling their collective work into a single framework, he usefully sketches possible future directions for research and situates the field within wider scholarly debates and thematic interests—parameters that outstrip the more limited purposes stated in Goodfriend's introduction. Though much of what he has to say is speculative, it is clear that Voorhees at least believes that the history of this short-lived colony has much to contribute to fields well beyond the confines of early American history, to include family history, Dutch history, biography, identity formation, book history, legal history, material culture, and more. His essay underscores the function of the volume as a prospectus to entice more scholars to contribute to the groundswell of support for colonial Dutch history that has quietly but persistently been bringing this field to scholarly attention since the mid-1980s. Gehring gives us to understand that, while this may be a very small club, it is actively seeking new members.

Members of the club have their work cut out for them. Misconceptions of the Dutch experience in America abound, notably as the British and others attempted to supersede, even eradicate, the colony's beginnings both in practice and in scholarship. Two articles in the volume reveal the processes by which tangled webs of misconceptions are constructed and deconstructed. Annette Stott, an art historian, highlights the difficulties of untangling authentic images of the Dutch period from later historical vicissitudes that distorted those images in the name of Romanticism, politics, patriotism, or simply flights of fancy. As Stott's work indicates, early histories of New Amsterdam tended to depict the colony's residents as uniformly Dutch, however exaggerated those images of Dutch-ness might be. By the late nineteenth century, however, there appeared to be growing recognition of the rich diversity among the peoples settled in the area. Bertrand Van Ruymbeke's article chronicles the history of just one of those peoples, the Walloons. In the process, he shows how their history, too, became tangled, though in their case it became caught up in, even ab-

sorbed by, the history of French Huguenots, with whom they are often confused.

Though not quite as centered on misperceptions of the Dutch themselves, another argumentative strategy that makes its appearance in some of the essays seeks to undo blanket proclamations about the American historical experience that belie or ignore Dutch exceptionalism. Dennis Maika's article shows how Dutch civic traditions, especially their distinctive conceptions of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, did not simply disappear when the English overtook the colony. Simon Middleton's work on municipal regulation suggests that the *first modern economy* (as Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude have dubbed the early modern Netherlands), transplanted its unique blend of a traditional moral economy with more advanced economic infrastructure to the New World. Richard Waldron's reinterpretation of the history of New Sweden combines both strategies, suggesting that scholars' failures to comprehend the colony of New Sweden arose not only from misunderstandings of the history of Sweden more generally, but also because so many of the financiers, leaders, and even colonists of New Sweden were Dutch. Due in large part to the close trading relationship between the Netherlands and Sweden in the Old World, the histories and the people of the two settlements became inextricably intertwined with each other. Neither New Netherland nor New Sweden were born of national experiences in the same sense as New Spain or New France. If this is the case, then, *Revisiting New Netherland* invites its reader to contemplate the question of what to call this history. Is it Dutch? American? Or something else entirely? Wim Klooster's contribution, for example, suggests that it was essentially a transnational, even supranational, one caught up in a separate Atlantic world of traded goods and exchanged ideas where national boundaries and identities were often eclipsed or laid by the wayside.

When it is again revisited in ten or twenty years, what will the history of New Netherland look like? Whatever the answer to this question turns out to be, this volume, part synthesis and part hopeful prolegomenon, seeks to shape that future and to invite new scholars to participate in shaping an historical field at a fledgling stage of development, an opportunity that does not exist in many fields of history. Perhaps the publication of this volume, with its rather gutsy claims, will later be seen as the successful call to arms that served notice of New Netherland history's taking its rightful place in current historiography. If not, it will not have been for lack of nerve or effort.

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