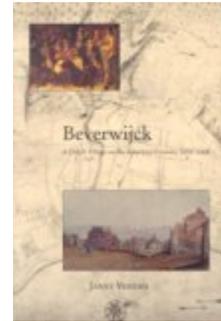


Janny Venema. *Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652-1664*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003. 527 pp. \$31.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7914-6080-1; \$86.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-6079-5.

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## Beverwijck Uncovered

The past several years have seen the publication of several monographs on New Netherland that work to bring the history of the Dutch colonial experience in North America out of the margins and into the mainstream of colonial American historiography.[1] While these new books focus on the entirety of the Dutch colonial experiments in North America, a topic often considered fairly narrow in both time and space, Janny Venema goes even further in narrowing the perspective. In *Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652-1664*, she gives us the most in-depth look at the twelve-year existence of the Dutch community known as Beverwijck on the northern reaches of both the Hudson River and the colony of New Netherland.

In many ways, Venema's work compliments the arguments put forth by Jaap Jacobs in his recently published monograph *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (2005). Jacobs argues that New Netherland's importance in the larger Dutch colonial world was not, as often put forth, merely as a trading venture, but as a settlement colony. Venema offers a similar argument, but one that focuses solely on the settlement of Beverwijck alone. Like Jacobs and other scholars, she sees much more maturity and complexity in this Dutch frontier community than scholars have previously acknowledged.[2] By the time of the English takeover, she argues, Beverwijck had not only a healthy trade system, but also fully developed governmental and church administrations as well as opportunities for both men and women involved in a variety of trades and crafts.

Also, like many scholars, Venema analyzes her subject from the perspective of cross-cultural encounters.[3] She states that hers "is a study of construction, structure and operation of an urban community in a contact situation from the perspective of the fatherland" (p. 25).

In order to fully uncover life in Beverwijck, Venema first focuses on the physical and material world of Beverwijck. By showing how settlers were able to construct a town based on Dutch concepts of a successful community—presence of a church, a poorhouse, a school, mills, roads, bridges, and houses—along the upper reaches of Hudson River, she illustrates her "hypothesis that location played not only an essential role in the Atlantic setting, but also in laying out the village; it accelerated the development of the community and provided individuals with particular opportunities" (p. 22). In chapter 2, she shows how this Dutch physical and material landscape then helped to bring about an "orderly village" (p. 99). Here she argues that the administration of church, poorhouse, schools, and courts helped to stabilize the community and allow it to develop beyond a mere trading post. Chapter 3 offers us a look at the role of the Van Rensselaers as leaders of the community, which helped bring about the stabilization of Beverwijck.

It is in chapter 4 that Venema offers her most convincing demonstrations of how cross-cultural encounters in this Dutch-American landscape offered individuals unique opportunities. Here she presents the lives of five individuals whose names are mostly unfamiliar and

whose stories are not normally told. She successfully intertwines the Dutch perspectives and American experiences of men who were able to take advantage of both the stability and fluidity of Beverwijck in order to become successful burghers. For example, she introduces the reader to Volckert Jansz Douw, who arrived in Rensselaerswijck in 1641; he purchased land in 1649, to which he received a patent in 1652, something only possible in a stable colony. In this contact situation, Douw became familiar with the Indians and their languages, and was able to benefit from both the Indian and community trades. Douw also cooperated with other burghers in the operation of a brewery and was able to purchase more land where he raised livestock and grew tobacco. While Douw was not a member of the officially sanctioned Dutch Reformed Church (he was a Lutheran), he was still elected to the magistrate in 1652, in which he served throughout the 1650s (pp. 249-254). It is in these brief stories of previously obscure lives that we see how the physical landscape, cross-cultural encounters, and Dutch ideas and practices of stability and success came together in Beverwijck.

Venema's last chapters on workers (blacksmiths, bakers, brewers, tavern keepers) and on survival strategies, particularly poor relief, also provide clear examples of how location, administrative stability, and fluidity of opportunity allowed people to succeed and survive in Beverwijck.[4] Furthermore, one of Venema's main contributions to the field of New Netherland and Beverwijck/Albany historiography is the large amount of data that she presents. As a part of the New Netherland Project at the New York State Library, she, along with Charles Gehring, has been providing an invaluable service to scholars of New Netherland history by organizing, translating, and publishing collections of documents to make available to the public. This book continues in that service by providing quite detailed appendices that show population sizes; locations and descriptions of lot patents; house measurements; magistrates; lists and tables of people who held particular jobs in the community; wages for farmhands; and locations of individual town lots.

The vast amount of data is reflective of the research Venema did to complete her dissertation, on which this book is based, and the book's main weakness is that quite often it reads like a dissertation. In fact, she refers to the book as a "dissertation" (p. 25). All the elements are present to answer her central question, namely how did "a culture brought by the Europeans, in the beginning phase of this settlement, changed under influence of the

physical environment and the native population?" Unfortunately, the evidence is often not clearly linked together (p. 20). The clearest example of this is in her inclusion of Native Americans. While they are of central importance to her thesis, they are often presented merely as individuals or groups the Dutch reacted to, instead of interacted with. The significance of the Indian presence often seems inserted into the narrative, rather than integrated into it.

That said, Venema provides scholars interested in community studies with clear examples of how to uncover the significance of individual lives within the context of culture and space. She has also provided a service to those who work in New Netherland history by uncovering such vast amounts of significant and overlooked data, and by making a significant contribution to the continual revision of New Netherland history.

#### Notes

[1]. Joyce Goodfriend, ed., *Revisiting New Netherland: Perspectives on Early Dutch America* (Boston: Brill, 2005); and Jaap Jacobs, *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth-Century America* (Boston: Brill, 2005).

[2]. Venema particularly argues against Sung Bok Kim's claim that, at the time of the English takeover of the colony in 1664, Beverwijck consisted of only two hundred souls under a commercial directorate. See Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978). For other recently published scholars who, like Venema and Jacobs, see Beverwijck as a fully functioning community and not just a trading post, see Martha Dickinson Shattuck, "A Civil Society: Court and Community in Beverwijck, New Netherland, 1652-1664" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1993); and Dennis Sullivan, *The Punishment of Crime in Colonial New York: The Dutch Experience in Albany during the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997). Donna Merwick's work should also be considered in this vein, but a significant amount of her attention is focused on the English period of the community. See Donna Merwick, *Possessing Albany, 1630-1710: The Dutch and English Experiences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[3]. Donna Merwick, *The Shame and the Sorrow: Dutch-Amerindian Encounters in New Netherland* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006); and Paul Otto, *The Dutch-Munsee Encounter in America: The Struggle for Sovereignty in the Hudson Valley* (Oxford:

Berghahn, 2005).

[4]. Much of this work is a continuation of Venema's earlier contributions to understanding poverty in Bev-

erwijck. See particularly, Janny Venema, "Poverty and Charity in Seveenteenth-Century Beverwijck/Albany, 1652-1700," *New York History* 80 (1999): 369-390.

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