

J. van den Hout. *Adriaen van der Donck: A Dutch Rebel in Seventeenth-Century America.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018. xvi + 203 pp. \$27.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4384-6922-5.

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Adriaen van der Donck (1618-55) is most famous among scholars of New Netherland for his influential treatise *Description of New Netherland* (1655), a survey of the geography, native peoples, flora, and fauna (especially beavers) of the Dutch colony intended to encourage the further settlement of the West India Company's (WIC) Hudson Valley possessions. For the WIC, though, Van der Donck was an irritating troublemaker and critic, who, as spokesman for the colonists, tried unsuccessfully to persuade the States-General to force reforms of governance on the WIC.

The independent scholar J. van den Hout has now provided us with the first comprehensive biography of this colonist, lawyer, lobbyist, publicist, and gadfly. Mining archives on both sides of the Atlantic, the author offers a straightforward chronological account of Van der Donck's short but eventful life. It was a life of replete with adventure, scholarship, and politics.

The scion of an elite Breda family scarred by the Netherlandish wars, Van der Donck studied law at Leiden University and then secured the patronage of none other than Kiliaen van Rensselaer, *patroon* of Rensselaerswyck in the recently established colony of New Netherland. No source tells us precisely why Van der Donck was prepared to leave the prosperous Dutch Republic for the uncertain wilds of the New World, but the

author plausibly suggests that Van der Donck was a singularly ambitious and energetic personality, and he may have found the wide-open prospects of New Netherland an attractive arena in which to make his mark. He served as an official in Van Rensselaer's patroonship, eagerly surveying the landscape, meeting with indigenous peoples, and advocating improvements in the lives of its colonists. A disgruntled Van Rensselaer, more interested in his patroonship's prosperity than welfare, dismissed the young lawyer, who soon found a new niche in the service of Willem Kieft, director-general of New Netherland for the WIC. Van der Donck smoothed over Kieft's contentious relations with local Indians and was rewarded with an estate in what is now the city of Yonkers.

Very soon, however, Van der Donck embroiled himself in New Amsterdam's contentious politics, in which colonists expressed great dissatisfaction with Kieft's management of the colony. When Pieter Stuyvesant became the new WIC director in 1645, the colonists, led by Van der Donck, clamored for a more representative local government in place of the WIC's corporate rule. Matters came to a head in 1649, when Van der Donck traveled back to the Dutch Republic to present a formal petition on behalf of the colonists to the States General to set up a more representative municipal government in New Amsterdam. He

seemed poised to have this wish granted, when war broke out in 1652 between the Republic and England, and the States General shelved any plans to tinker with the government of New Netherland.

Despite this political failure, Van der Donck also busied himself in this period with the work he became most famous for, writing his elaborate and glowing description of New Netherland, which was published posthumously and generated a considerable uptick in Dutch enthusiasm for and emigration to the colony before it fell into English hands in 1664. Defeated by the WIC, Van der Donck agreed to give up all pretensions to public office in order to be allowed to return to his family and lands in New Netherland. He died there sometime in late 1655, likely the victim of Indian raids on his estates.

Van den Hout relates the events of Van der Donck's short but storied life capably and sympathetically. Through the lens of this biography we are introduced into the tangled, contentious, and often hardscrabble life of the colony of New Netherland, threatened at once by economic deprivation, Indian hostility, and internal political antagonism. The author relies perhaps a little too heavily on Russell Shorto's excessively admiring account of New Netherland, *The Island at the Center of the World* (2005), for her historiographical context, but her scouring of all the possible manuscript sources on Van der Donck's life is an exemplary exercise in thorough archival research. The book is an important addition to the literature on the short-lived Dutch colonial experiment in North America.

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