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Review of van der Donck's "A Description of New Netherland" and Wendell's "To Do Justice to Him & Myself"

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A Description of New Netherland. By Adriaen van der Donck. Edited by Charles T. Gehring and William A. Starna. Translated by Diederik Willem Goedhuys. Foreword by Russell Shorto. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xxii + 176 pp., foreword, preface, introduction, map, index. \$24.95 cloth.)

“To Do Justice to Him & Myself”: Evert Wendell’s Account Book of the Fur Trade with Indians in Albany, New York, 1695–1726. Edited and translated by Kees-Jan Waterman. Linguistic information by Gunther Michelson. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2008. xiv + 310 pp., illustrations, tables, acknowledgments, introduction, references, index, CD-ROM. \$50.00 paper.)

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Ethnohistorical research of the Hudson Valley peoples has traditionally been hindered by the loss of many Dutch records, especially from before 1647, and by the language barrier that the extant Dutch records pose to scholars with limited linguistic ability. In the nineteenth century, many sources were made accessible, but often through incomplete or unreliable translations. Other manuscripts have been considered unimportant or lain unknown in private collections and archives. The volumes under review here remedy this situation by providing trustworthy translations of formerly unreliable or unknown work. *A Description of New Netherland* has appeared before but is now available in a newly translated and edited edition. The account book of Evert Wendell makes its first outing as a translated work. Well translated

and admirably edited, both works substantially contribute to our understanding of native people in the Hudson Valley and beyond.

Adriaen van der Donck's *Beschryvinge van Nieuw Nederland* (1656 [1655]) (*Description of New Netherland*) describes the landscape and waterways of New Netherland, paints a detailed picture of the colony's flora and fauna, and discusses the Dutch colonies and their activities in the New World. Ethnohistorians will also find this book a valuable resource for the study of indigenous peoples. About 30 percent of the volume focuses exclusively on them. Van der Donck had experience with both the Munsee Indians of the Manhattan Island environs and the Mohawks and Mahicans of the Fort Orange (later Albany) environs. His observations are direct and well informed, commenting on nearly all aspects of Native American culture in this region. Careful readers will note, however, that Van der Donck rarely distinguished in his descriptions between various native peoples with whom he was familiar, and care should be taken in drawing conclusions about one group or another based upon the information his volume provides.

The book is newly translated by South African Diederik Willem Goedhuys and edited by Charles T. Gehring and William A. Starna, experts on seventeenth-century Dutch language and history and the Indian people of the Hudson Valley, respectively. Before this publication, those seeking information on Indian people from Van der Donck and without facility in seventeenth-century Dutch were forced to rely on Jeremiah Johnson's imperfect and incomplete translation first published in 1841. In 1968 it was republished in a new edition by Thomas F. O'Donnell. Material regarding the Indians was corrected by Ada van Gastel, but those not familiar with Van Gastel's work have been deeply handicapped.

The new edition has restored important sections missing in the Johnson edition, such as "Of Gifts and Offerings" and "Of the Indians' Government and Public Policy." The new translation also greatly improves on the earlier Johnson offering. For example, when describing wampum's manufacture, Van der Donck, as the new translation points out, wrote "it is made of conch shells" (95). The earlier translation indicated that the black shell beads were made of conch shells, which is surely wrong—true wampum (white shell beads) were made of whelk (or, generically, conch) while the dark beads came from the dark portions of the quahog clam. Johnson's translations could clearly be misleading, as another example from the section on wampum demonstrates. Noting the importance of wampum to the fur trade, Johnson's version states that "many thousand strings are exchanged every year for peltries near the seashores where the wampum is only made" (93). All other sources make clear, and the new translation con-

firms, that wampum was “made in the coastal districts” and shipped to the interior “where the pelts come from” (95). These are just two examples of the many improvements Goedhuys has made over earlier editions.

Evert Wendell’s account book, 1695–1726, is one of several manuscripts kept by him and held by the New-York Historical Society. It may not seem that such a record could yield much information on native people, but Wendell’s notes can be heavily mined for information on the fur trade and the native experience more generally. His customers principally included Mohawks and Mahicans, but also many others from New England, Canada, and the regions west of Iroquoia. Much can be learned from the transactions between Wendell and his customers, such as the role of women in the fur trade, the diversity of native customers, relationships among native people, adoption and slavery among the Indians, and the wide range of goods exchanged.

The editor has done much to highlight these insights in his exhaustive introduction. Kees-Jan Waterman has had long experience in researching New Netherland and native affairs there. His ninety-page introduction includes an important analysis and exposition of intercultural interaction and trade and includes numerous plates, tables, and graphs in which he synthesizes much of the information on Indians found in the account book. Along with Waterman’s introduction, this account book is a treasure trove of information on native people at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Translating the account book brought special challenges. First is the difficulty in accurately transcribing accounting notes from a well-worn, 300-year-old book inscribed with late-seventeenth-century Dutch handwriting—sometimes little better than a scrawl—and including cryptic notations and other markings. Second comes the difficulty of accurately translating and presenting it in a form that makes the account book readable and usable. Waterman has done yeoman’s work here to try to capture the book in all its nuance and cryptic style, along with faithfully reproducing visual data not easily transposed onto the printed page. Reproduced here are rough sketches Wendell made of some of his customers, highlighting especially their facial and chest tattoos in order to properly identify them in the future. Also reproduced are some pages with pictographs Wendell used to track his customers’ indebtedness. All markings and pictures are also noted in the translation.

The translation is solid and trustworthy. However, translators and editors of both volumes have been forced to make compromises when bringing the language and worldview of early modern Dutch writers to twenty-first-century English standards. A case in point is their respective translation of the Dutch words *wild/wilt* (and plural *wilden*, or *wildinnen* for females).

Goedhuys's editors chose to present this word as "Indian," while Waterman chose "savage." Neither is entirely satisfactory. Since the Dutch occasionally used *indiaan*, it is clear that a different meaning was intended by *wild*. To translate this as "savage," however, risks communicating to modern readers of English a racist attitude not implied by the original Dutch term. In order to capture as closely as possible the Dutch mindset of the time, the original term should be kept or translated literally as "wild one" or "wildman." Either way, the term requires an explanation, actually offered by Van der Donck himself (75–76), to make clear to modern readers how early modern Dutchmen perceived Indians as lacking the cultural accoutrements of civilized peoples.

In addition to the otherwise trustworthy translations, both volumes include important editorial features. Both include page numbers of the original manuscripts for easy reference, while the Wendell volume includes a searchable transcript of the whole manuscript on CD-ROM. Editors of both incorporate useful annotations providing important historical background and ethnological information. Gehring and Starna have gone the extra mile in suggesting where Van der Donck may have drawn some of his words and ideas in the contemporary literature. Waterman heavily documents the account book: there are nearly sixty pages of annotation (783 separate notes) that explain confusing points in the text, identify and discuss native customers, and provide a wealth of information about historical context. Both volumes are also indexed, although scholars seeking information on Native Americans will find that the Wendell volume's index includes greater breadth of terms, and thus it is more useful than the Van der Donck volume's index (where *wampum* or *sewant*, for example, is omitted).

Even with the availability of excellent works of translation such as these, it is important for scholars to work in a document's original language whenever possible. For that reason, readers with facility in Dutch should be aware of *Indianenverhalen: De vroegste beschrijvingen van Indianen langs de Hudsonrivier (Indian Stories: The Earliest Writings on Indians along the Hudson River)*, edited by Waterman, Jaap Jacobs, and Gehring, which includes the portion of Van der Donck's work focusing on the Native Americans. Together, these volumes offer ethnohistorians interested in the indigenous peoples of the Hudson Valley outstanding resources for further study.

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