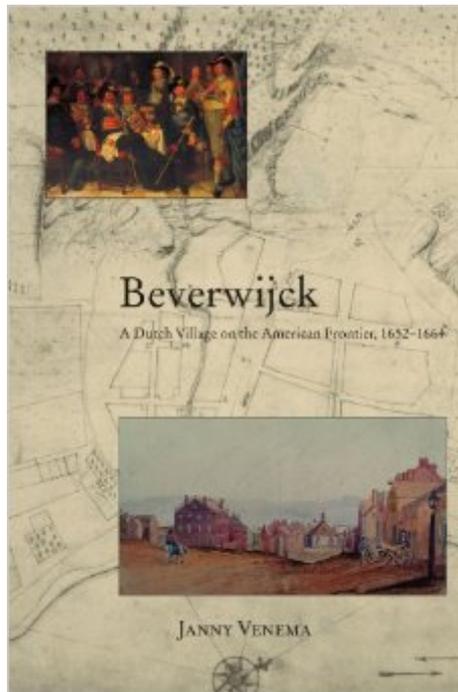


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Beverwijck: A Dutch Village On The American Frontier, 1652-1664



Synopsis

Beverwijck explores the rich history and Dutch heritage of one of North America's oldest cities Albany, New York. Drawing on documents translated from the colonial Dutch as well as maps, architectural drawings, and English-language sources, Janny Venema paints a lively picture of everyday life in colonial America. In 1652, Petrus Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherland, established a court at Fort Orange, on the west side of New York State's upper Hudson River. The area within three thousand feet of the fort became the village of Beverwijck. From the time of its establishment until 1664, when the English conquered New Netherland and changed the name of the settlement to Albany, Beverwijck underwent rapid development as newly wealthy traders, craftsmen, and other workers built houses, roads, bridges, and a school, as well as a number of inns. A well-organized system of poor relief also helped less wealthy settlers survive in the harsh colonial conditions. Venema's careful research shows that although Beverwijck resembled villages in the Dutch Republic in many ways, it quickly took on features of the new, American society that was already coming into being."

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Customer Reviews

Finally, a look at the other 17th century Dutch city on the Hudson. With the recent glut of books on the history of New York City (which, personally, I can't get enough of), it is refreshing to take a break and read about the history of the state's capitol, Albany--Beverwijck, as it was known way back when. In Janny Venema's "Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652-1664",

Albany's Dutch years are finally given their just due. Venema's extensive research is evident in just about every paragraph, and is conveyed in a way that most historians strive: fluidly, logically, and at a modest pace. This 500+ page book reads remarkably quickly, much to the author's credit. Many of the issues and personalities that shaped the development of New Amsterdam are echoed here: skirmishes with the natives; desperate moments when it seemed the place would implode; the ubiquitous Peter Stuyvesant; struggles with vice, etc. But what I found surprising is Venema's theme that Beverwijck was just as tolerant of races, just as much a springboard of modern America's ethics as was New Amsterdam. The Brooklyn guy inside me bristled at first, but the evidence is overwhelming. I hope others will pick up this study, as it provides an indispensable look at a time and place that has been unnecessarily overlooked.

This book is the definite book on the colony of Beverwijck, which would later become Albany in New York State. Venema pays great detail to pretty much all the aspects of life in this frontier town. The dress, Indian relations, healthcare, poor care, trade, important people. It gives a very good insight into how life was lived in the 17th century in both Holland and New Netherland. The detail and conciseness is also what is the matter with this book. It's good to use as reference and to look for things mentioned before, but because of the many details it is not always easy to get an overall view. The research done was great (it's a dissertation) but makes it at times unreadable. There are for example over 120 pages of notes in the back of the book. It's a very good example of total-history, very interesting to get a good view of life in that age, but not something you would pleasantly read.

I did not keep this book but took it to a highly eclectic bookseller. Not that I didn't like it but that I just needed to sell some books one month. He said, "This is arcane!!" I said, "I think it is her PhD thesis." There's my review since I am not a Dutch speaker or scholar but just someone who fell in love with the story because of Russell Shorto's account, "Island at the Center of the Earth." I'd say this is a worthy read for anyone who lives in or loves Albany, NY and wants to know its foundational history. The quick version is that the Dutch needed money to fight with Spain and beaver furs and pelts were worth a fortune and where Albany is, the Dutch erected Fort Orange and traded for beaver nearly to extinction. The "new world" was the resource after the population in Russia had been decimated by the same activity. As "Beaver Village" developed, many principles of government came into use that expressed Iroquois values as well as ideas from the Netherlands, which was forced toward democracy by its combination of water emergencies and regional

independence. Those elements really became the paradigm we live with now as our ideal. Now I say this without being a perfect scholar of the matter, just a dabbler, so someone else may correct me and I won't take offense. This is what makes so compelling reading the Dutch adventures into what we now call New York State (because the British vanquished the Dutch and named it all after the Duke of York). Still, it was never a frontier suited for imperial governance and the British, we know, didn't keep it long. Janny Venema is a fine scholar and whether this work is arcane or for your coffee table maybe depends on where you live and what intrigues you personally. Without question, it is a finely detailed and thoroughly presented accounting of how things were in the middle 1600s. ps, my eclectic bookseller bought it. In Oregon.

This is the most comprehensive text available covering the early years of Albany. Includes a great deal of detail about the early residents and is essential for the family researcher. I have purchased 2 copies, one for home and one for the office as I refer to it so frequently. My compliments to the author, it is much appreciated.

Janny Venema gives her readers a close and rewarding look at Dutch life in early America. Her description of Beverwijck's founding and development offers important glimpses of that village's social, economic, political, and religious life. Her research is deep, her writing clear, and her findings valuable. This is among the very best of early American town studies.

Five stars because although Janny Venema is a scholar, not a storyteller, the wealth of information in this book makes up for its slightly dry narrative style, giving the most comprehensive picture I've yet found of a settlement that was pivotal in colonial America as well as my family history. I bought the book because my 9X-great-grandfather was one of the first settlers of Beverwijck. My genealogical research has yielded substantial source material documenting various details of his life, but I wanted to develop a clearer picture of the place and time he lived in. Venema's book provides that picture of context and culture, providing an in-depth look at the people, politics, environment, and commerce that shaped this early colonial settlement. All the information in the book is drawn from original sources of record. Venema takes care to describe the lives of settlers in all social and economic strata, not just the leaders and power-brokers. She also includes a lot of appendix material such as charts identifying settlers by trade and occupation, plus property records organized by individual settler/owner, and a comprehensive index-by-name. My only disappointment was that some of the maps and drawings included are not very large and not easy to read.

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