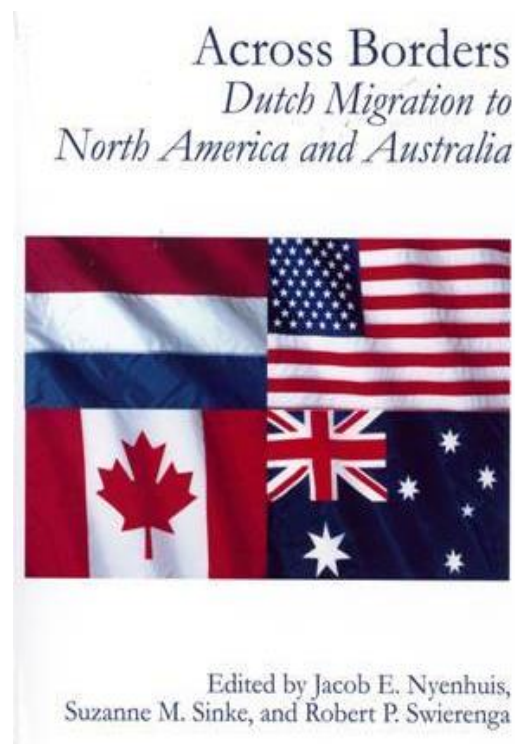


Review
Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Suzanne M. Sinke and
Robert P. Swierenga (eds):
Across borders:
Dutch migration to North America and Australia
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Reviewed by Eric Mielants



Across Borders is in essence the conference proceedings of the 2009 Biennial Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies (AADAS), organized at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Canada. Eighteen different chapters, mostly written by professional historians, some of who are

based in the Netherlands, cover a wide range of issues: literature and language; labor migration; migration and memory; immigrant experiences to the US; and a surprisingly large section on Canadian history.

Whereas some may associate Dutch migration to North America with the settlement of Nieuw Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century, most of the historical contributions deal with relatively recent waves of migration in the 19th and 20th centuries. As Enne Koops reminds us in chapter 2, between 1948 and the early 1960s, approximately 410,000 Dutch citizens emigrated overseas, with 55 percent of them moving to Canada (147,000) and the United States (76,000) (p. 19). This recent migration provides for some interesting oral history and speculation as to the extent there existed an “emigration culture” (Koops) and the degree to which certain churches, such as the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland, facilitated the journey overseas, assisting Dutch immigrants with finding housing and jobs through the networks that welcomed the new arrivals (Janet Sheeres in chapter 3). Chapter 4, written by Gerrit Gerrits, is basically a micro-history of a settlement of Dutch Catholic farmers in the Antigonish Diocese of Nova Scotia. It illustrates how financial assistance through loans was made available to Dutch farmers through the Land Settlement Office of the Diocese, such that a large and successful dairy industry eventually replaced the existing methods of subsistence farming. Chapter 5, by Gerrit Sheeres, provides an insightful perspective from the view of a Dutch immigrant in the small town of Chesley, Ontario just before the First World War. The 300 letters he sent home are illustrative of how a Dutch immigrant perceived his own culture and society to be so much more unequal than the social structure he encountered in the New World. Donald Sinnema reminds us in chapter 6 how fluid the Canada – U.S. border was one hundred years ago, when Dutch immigrants could move back and forth without any hassle. Moreover, he claims that Dutch immigrants in North America during the 1870s, ‘80s and ‘90s “saw themselves as part of a large Dutch immigrant community in America that linked a network of large and small settlements to each other” (p. 71).

Chapters 7 through 11 focus on language and literature. Alida De Peuter and Joanna van Dijk focus in Chapter 7 on three Dutch-Canadian writers: John Terpstra, Hugh Cook and Aritha van Herk who all “place the immigrant’s journey in the framework of biblical or classical stories of flight and exile” (p. 75). Though they claim that Dutch-Canadians and their literature have become invisible in Canadian society, the authors also state that “divided between two cultures, Dutch-Canadians are a people in transition who fear assimilation in a colonial country” (p. 88). This is not exactly what I have encountered in talking to the retirees at the annual ‘Sjoel and Poel’ organized by the Dutch Canadian Association in Ottawa, or when conversing with Dutch members of the Canadian

Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies at Carleton University, but perhaps my informants did not constitute a representative sample. Kristen den Hartog's contribution summarizes her family's own efforts to reconstruct the life of her grandparents, who lived in the Netherlands during World War II, despite knowing no Dutch herself and illustrates the desire of second and third generation immigrants to learn more about where their family came from and the hardships they endured. Chapter Nine, by Hans Krabbendam, reviews how the topic of emigration prominently features in Dutch juvenile literature in the 20th century, especially in the 1950s, and how often it glorified emigration experiences of the past. George Harinck, in Chapter 10, focuses on the early years of the Dutch-American Bookselling Trade. As he points out, in 1880 the 100,000 Dutch immigrants in America vastly outnumbered the 60,000 Europeans in the Dutch East Indies and though import taxes were quite high, the bookselling trade did better than expected (especially in bibles, almanacs and calendars). In Chapter 11, Jaap van Marle discusses the linguistic phenomenon of Yankee Dutch, sometimes called 'Dutch with English words', where early Yankee Dutch represents acculturated Dutch and late Yankee Dutch corresponds more to broken English. The fieldwork he's undertaken is certainly interesting but it's unfortunate that it was not compared to the Jersey Dutch of an earlier era. Chapter 12, by Peter Ester and Jacob Nyenhuis, is a study of older Dutch-Americans in Holland, Michigan and the variation in the degree of religiosity and ethnic belonging due to generational differences and immigration into previously segregated and somewhat isolated communities. Robert Swierenga provides a media content analysis of 19th century Dutch immigrant murderers and their trials in Chapter 13. The coverage of these events and their subsequent executions were, he argues, mostly written as morality plays and warnings to live by biblical directives. In Chapter 14, Huug van den Dool offers the reader a fascinating journey of a young Dutchman, Jan Vogel (1839-1907), and his adventures in the U.S. during the Civil War era, based on Vogel's decades' worth of copious notes. The subsequent chapter, by Robert Schoone-Jongen, analyzes the role Dutch-Americans played in the Paterson silk strike of 1913. As more than half of all the silk cloth produced in the US came from Paterson, NJ, it is an interesting case study of the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) failed attempt to radicalize most workers. The Dutch, who constituted 11% of Paterson's population and 82% of the borough of Prospect Park, were particularly opposed to the IWW and its contempt for religion, earning them the epithet of "scabs" from Big Bill Haywood. Chapter 16, by Paul Werkman, also emphasizes the religiosity of small Christian labor organizations that attempted to emerge in North America during the first half of the 20th century.

Nonja Peters is the only one to write about Dutch Australians, in Chapter 17. She argues in favor of more web-based innovations to preserve the cultural heritage of immigrants and more collaboration between both receiving and sending countries in terms of mutual heritage activities. Despite the Dutch politicization of immigration in recent years, there has been little focus on emigration in the Netherlands. Meanwhile, emigration centres and museums have opened in Italy and Germany. In the last chapter of this volume, Mari Smits claims that this has changed somewhat due to the popularity of the Dutch reality TV show *Ik Vertrek* ('I'm leaving') where family members say goodbye to loved ones who have decided to leave the Netherlands in search of a better quality of life (more tranquility, space, nature, less overpopulation and crime).

Overall, the essays are informative and well-written but this reviewer believes that many social scientists for whom international migration and integration are important subject matters would have preferred more hard data and a slightly more contemporary focus. As a sociologist, I was surprised that Smits said nothing about contemporary return migration because in the 1940s and 1950s nearly 30% of Dutch immigrants did choose to return to the Netherlands. Why the last part of her contribution ends with a few hundred Dutch farmers leaving the Netherlands is also a mystery as the majority of Dutch emigrants today are unlikely to take up farming as a professional enterprise. Schoone-Jongen, Ester and Nyenhuis all duly note the religiosity, relative anti-unionism and pro-Republican political preferences of many early 20th century Dutch immigrants, but a discussion of the degree to which this characterization is still accurate would have been warranted given how prominent conservative politicians such as former British Columbia premier Wilhelmus (Bill) Vander Zalm or Iowa Governor hopeful Bob Vander Plaats continue to garner the attention of various media outlets. The statement made by Ester and Nyenhuis that "Dutch Americans colonies were slower than many other immigrant groups in assimilating to American society and its mainstream culture" (p. 155) is quite controversial and not backed up by any evidence or bibliographical references. In a book on migration and integration (or lack thereof), only the insightful and informative introductory essay by William Katerberg pays sufficient attention to theories and social science concepts that may assist in elucidating this complicated decision making process. These reservations notwithstanding, the volume is likely to appeal to any with an interest in the past and present migration of Dutch immigrants.

About the reviewer

Eric Mielants is Associate Professor of Sociology at Fairfield University, USA. He is the author of *The origins of capitalism and the 'Rise of the West'*, (Temple

University Press, 2007), co-editor of *Caribbean migration to the US and Western Europe: Essays on incorporation, identity and citizenship* (Temple University Press, 2009) and co-editor of *Mass migration in the world-system: Past, present and future* (Paradigm Press, 2010). He has written articles on social theory, political economy, racism, and international migration issues which have been published in Dutch, French, Spanish, Korean, Turkish and Japanese.