Not Confined to the Village Clearings:
Indian Women in the Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1695–1732

Kees-Jan Waterman, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and Jan Noel, University of Toronto

This article presents documentary evidence supporting a fundamental update of the masculine persona the fur trader carries in both the popular and the scholarly imagination. It demonstrates that, certainly in colonial New York, fur transactions were part of the norm for people of both sexes. Much of the ethnohistorical literature on intercultural economic exchanges in colonial North America has focused on native men trading with Euro-American merchants. Only as of late, scholarship has signaled ways in which indigenous women participated in the expanding colonial American market for furs. This breaks away from a longstanding paradigm of the two sexes operating within largely segregated social, economic, and political spheres. The older approach depicted a gendered division of labor between aboriginal men who controlled the 'forest' (hunting-warfare-diplomacy-trade) and women who were confined to the 'village clearings' (household-agriculture). This article offers further challenges to the classic polarization, and it demonstrates that native women regularly travelled on fur trade business which took them far beyond their villages. It discusses their visits to Dutch-speaking merchants in the American colonial town of Albany and the rural Hudson Valley county of Ulster.

This article is based on the analysis of data from two nearly contemporaneous account books of the fur trade in colonial New York: Evert Wendell's "Account Book of the Fur Trade in Albany, 1695–1726," on deposit at the New-York Historical Society, and an anonymous ledger cataloged as "Account Book, 1711–1729," in the holdings of the New York Public Library.[1] The latter contains a section of some 110 pages, recording

1. Kees-Jan Waterman is senior data manager at Data Archiving and Networked Services, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Waterman published, with J. Michael Smith, *Munsee Indian*

trade with Munsee natives between 1712 and 1732.[2] Our study produces a profile of hitherto-unknown clusters of Iroquoian and Algonquian women in the fur trade in the colony of New York during the closing years of the seventeenth century and the first third of the eighteenth century. The ledgers reveal women serving in roles that suggest economic initiative, financial responsibility, and geographical mobility—qualities more typically assigned to males than to females in the traditional "forest versus clearings" polarization.

Our findings are based on tabulations of each separate appearance of native women in the account books of these Albany and Ulster County traders. Usually, such an account contained multiple transactions, often spread out through a number of years and regularly including exchanges between the trader and other, associated indigenous individuals. A woman may appear only once, trading on another individual's account, or she can exhibit extended trading activities on an account of her own. With some regularity, they also traded for another native man or woman, having the associated debt or payment counted against their own balance. Our unit of measurement consists of each transaction that was recorded in the ledgers. The observations in this study are not based on the volume, price, or relative value of the articles and services acquired by individual native men and women. The value of purchases or debt remittances is recorded in the ledgers in a widely varying array of units of measurement, some of which were monetized, others not. Our tables and observations are based on counting numbers of transactions through all accounts.

Trade in Ulster County, New York, 1712–1732 (Syracuse University Press, 2013) and *"To Do Justice to Him and Myself": Evert Wendell's Account Book of the Fur Trade with Indians in Albany, New York, 1695–1726* (American Philosophical Society, 2008). Jan Noel teaches Canadian and North American colonial history at the University of Toronto. Noel is the author of over forty scholarly articles and books; she has recently published *Along a River: The First French Canadian Women* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

For an edited translation of the first manuscript see Kees-Jan Waterman, trans. and ed., *"To Do Justice to Him and Myself": Evert Wendell's Account Book of the Fur Trade with Indians in Albany, New York, 1695–1726* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2008); references are listed as *WAB*.

2. Philip John Schuyler Papers, Volume 11. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library (Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations). For an edited translation of this manuscript see Kees-Jan Waterman and J. Michael Smith, eds., Kees-Jan Waterman, trans., *Munsee Indian Trade in Ulster County, New York, 1712–1732* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013); references are listed as *UCAB*.

LITERATURE ON INDIAN WOMEN AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE FUR TRADE

Gender dichotomies often characterize portrayals of Eastern Woodlands groups. Anthropological and ethnohistorical literature on the Iroquois, a group heavily represented in our study, has traditionally described complementary but decidedly separate economic spheres. Much of the discussion of economic work of Iroquois women and their neighbors among the Mahicans and Munsees who lived in the Hudson or Mohawk Valleys or along the borderlands stretching northward into Canada tends to concentrate on production and distribution of food products, to the neglect of fishing, hunting and trading, and warfare, all of which activities sometimes involved women. The field was greatly influenced by the dictum of twentieth-century ethnographer Elisabeth Tooker that "In Northern Iroquoian societies men and women occupied different domains: the forest and the clearing."[3] As late as 2001, in *Facing East from Indian Country*, ethnohistorian Daniel Richter placed this observation right into the mouths of natives: "The 'forest,' Native people taught, belonged to men; the 'clearing' to women."[4]

These sweeping binaries are coming into question. Kathleen Bragdon, whose work focuses on northeastern Algonkians, cautions against the too-common use of "homogeneous, universal models" in describing and analyzing the roles of Indian women in colonial America. Gunlög Fur, assessing the eighteenth-century Delaware, observes that "Men and women

3. Elisabeth Tooker, "Women in Iroquois Society," in Michael K. Foster, Jack Campisi, and Marianne Mithun, eds., *Extending the Rafters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Iroquoian Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 109–23, quotation on 119.

4. Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5. Many writers elaborate on the importance of agricultural work in the village clearings, supplemented by mainly subsistence activities such as making clothing, footwear, mats, and pottery. The classic article on Iroquois women's control of food distribution as the source of their authority is Judith K. Brown, "Economic Organization and the Position of Women Among the Iroquois," *Ethnohistory*, 17:3–4 (1970): 151–67. For a wider sampling of the literature see W.G. Spittal, ed., *Iroquois Women An Anthology* (Ohsweken, Ontario: Irografts, 1990). The twenty-first century saw the publication of two full-length monographs on Iroquois women, both in their own ways re-asserting very strong claims for extensive female prestige and power, and discussing religious and political activities that crossed gender lines. However, neither of these books had much to say about trade. See Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000) and Roland Viau, *Femmes de personne: Sexes, genres et pouvoirs en Iroquoisie ancienne,* (Montreal: Boréal, 2000). On the Lenape see Gunlög Fur, *A Nation of Women: Gender and Colonial Encounters Among the Delaware Indians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

on a formal—or ideological—level took responsibility for different tasks arranged in a strictly complementary scheme, but exigencies of the day, common needs, and individual proclivities influenced who did what at any given time."[5]

A growing body of work on female journeys beyond the northeastern clearings has emerged. Primary sources have long held out tantalizing views of women traipsing across New York landscapes. As early as 1626, two years after the Dutch built an outpost at Fort Orange (later Albany) Nicolaes van Wassenaer noted that the fort and trading post at the upper Hudson were visited by "French Indians [. . .], both men and women." In the early 1630s, the Dutch explorer David Pietersz de Vries was approached by two Indians in a single canoe on the Delaware River. "An old Indian with a squaw" sold a quantity of beans and Indian corn to the starving crew. On Van den Bogaert's 1634–1635 journey into Mohawk country he encountered three Iroquois women, probably Oneida, en route to Mohawk villages to trade the salmon and tobacco they carried. Evidence in a Catskill-area deposition from January 1685, reveals two native women who sold Indian corn to a Dutch woman there, while "an old squaw" functioned as a "surety" in the exchange. The mid-eighteenth-century records of Albany merchant Robert Sanders and the dispatches of New France officials mention native women's involvement in flourishing contraband trade between Montreal and Albany.[6]

Some scholars suspect that the scattered references in the sources denote common practice.[7] Much recent work has focused on New York's

5. Kathleen Bragdon, "Gender as a Social Category in Native Southern New England," *Ethnohistory,* 43:4 (1996): 573–92, esp. 579, 586–87. Fur, *A Nation of Women,* 61.

6. For the first three cases, see J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Narratives of New Netherland 1609–1664* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 86; Fur, *A Nation of Women*, 15; and Charles T. Gehring and William A. Starna, eds., Charles T. Gehring, trans., *A Journey into Mohawk and Oneida Country, 1634–1635: The Journal of Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univeristy Press, 1988), 6. For the fourth instance, see A.J.F. Van Laer, trans. and ed., *Minutes of the Court of Albany, Rensselaerswijck and Schenectady 1668–1685* 3 Volumes (Albany, N.Y.: University of the State of New York, 1926–1932), III: 502–03. For references to the Montreal-Albany trade, see note 10 below.

7. Two recent examples are Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall, "Engendering New Netherland: Implications for Interpreting Early Colonial Societies," *Archaeologies*, 7:1 (April 2011): 121–53, and Gail D. MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). MacLeitch describes economic activities of Iroquois women for the second half of the eighteenth century; our present contribution provides fresh evidence that female sustained involvement in economic, commercial activities can be characterized as a fundamental continuum in Iroquois and Algonquian societies in the New Netherland/New York-Canadian region.

neighboring colony of Pennsylvania, an important fur trade frontier in the eighteenth century and one for which missionaries and officials left some useful records of trade (especially of activities they considered illicit). James H. Merrell suggested that among Pennsylvania's eighteenth-century Delaware "[in] the fur trade [. . .] native women were more deeply involved than scholars assume. Men did the hunting, but trade was a family affair."[8] Merrell, Gunlög Fur, and Jane T. Merritt all document various economic activities of Iroquois or Delaware women including a good deal of liquor-dealing in eighteenth century Pennsylvania.[9]

Other discoveries relate to neighboring New York. Scholars have uncovered a growing body of evidence that New York was a focal point for trans-border trade in which colonial and aboriginal women colluded. Combing the correspondence of officials in New France and New York mercantile and court records has turned up names of several dozen colonial and aboriginal women involved in smuggling activities, activities which in some cases persisted for decades.[10]

The substantial part indigenous women played in the fur trade in New York, in many cases developing accounts on their own name, has been suggested in these various sources, but historians have not been able to document how common the practice was. Even the few historians who consulted one of the key New York sources discussed in this article, the Wendell account book, have been unable to decipher the rather confus-

8. James H. Merrell, "The Other "Susquahannah Traders": Women and Exchange on the Pennsylvania Frontier," in Robert Olwell and Richard Tully, eds., *Cultures and Identities in Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 197–219, esp. 206.

9. Merrell shows that native women were very active in the liquor trade in Pennsylvania starting in the 1730s, "The Other "Susquahannah Traders"," 206–08. Gunlög Fur has noted similar evidence dating back to 1718, *A Nation of Women*, 102. Jane T. Merritt described several female traders in and around colonial Pennsylvania in the period between the 1720s and the mid-eighteenth century, *At the Crossroads: Indians and Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 63–66.

10. Sources relating to Montreal/New York contraband are cited in Jean Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade out of New France, 1713–60," Canadian Historical Association, *Report*, 1939, 61–76; Jan Noel "'Fertile with Fine Talk': Ungoverned Tongues among Haudenosaunee Women and Their Neighbors," *Ethnohistory*, 57:2 (2010): 201–23; and Noel, *Along a River: The First French Canadian Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 95–108. In addition to this material, Gretchen Green describes a few Iroquois women (from, or linked to Caughnawaga) who combined trading and diplomatic missions during the 1750s and afterwards, "Gender and the Longhouse: Iroquois Women in a Changing Culture," in Larry D. Eldridge, ed., *Women and Freedom in Early America* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 11–12. There is fascinating material about smuggling by Dutch and Aboriginal women in colonial New York in Dennis Sullivan, *The Punishment of Crime in Colonial New York: The Dutch Experience in Albany during the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 72, 98–99, 161.

ing accounts well enough to accurately assess how many women were involved.[11] While scholars discern that both sexes were caught up in trade, they continue to be hampered by uncertainly about whether women were anomalies, mere interlopers in an essentially male activity. One of our goals here is to shed further light on why the female presence has been so difficult to prove, even as we document two separate locales where women are so regularly mentioned in the records that they cannot be viewed as an exception or an anomaly.

KEY SOURCES

Taking advantage of the two previously underutilized New York sources, we propose to advance the topic beyond random sightings in the primary and secondary literature. Women such as the unnamed wife of the Mohawk 'Johonnaghquaa,' who traded on her own account and brought a pack of beavers from Canada to Evert Wendell in October 1708, occur frequently in the accounts.[12] Tantalizing details accompany some of the entries, for example the account of one Mohawk woman (again unnamed), described as "a pockmarked savage [. . .] from Canada," who came to trade in Albany in December 1705, conveying "greetings from the priest."[13]

Both of these account books were written in Dutch. They document hundreds of Indians acquiring European goods, usually on credit. Together they record almost four thousand transactions in which indigenous people purchased commodities and services, and almost one thousand instances when they remitted some or all of their debt by presenting goods or performing services for the merchants. The account book from Albany

11. Thomas Elliot Norton, *The Fur Trade in Colonial New York, 1686–1776* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974) underestimated female participation, at about a fifth, 28n4. See also Robert S. Grumet, "Sunksquaws, Shamans, and Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian Women During the 17th and 18th Centuries," in Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock, eds., *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Preager Publishers, 1980), 43–62; David A. Ezzo, "Female Status and the Life Cycle: A Cross-Cultural Perspective from Native North America," in William Cowan, ed., *Papers of the 22nd Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1991), 140. David A. Armour was on the right track with a remark about the Albany trade—which was unfortunately ignored in subsequent scholarship—that "it appears that female Indians traded about as much as males, opened accounts and paid their debts," *The Merchants of Albany, New York: 1686–1760* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986), 67. While our data suggests that "about as much" is an overestimation, Armour provided a welcome, rare acknowledgement of the strong female presence in the accounts.

12. *WAB*, 184. One month later, she had goods fetched for her by 'Sakadereuightha,' a Mohawk man with connections to Canada.

13. *WAB*, 164. Presumably, the Catholic priest lived and worked in the Montreal area.

consists predominantly of accounts of Mahican and Iroquois customers, originating from their ancestral homelands as well as from mission villages around Montreal, where many had resettled. The trade ledger from Ulster County details transactions with Algonquian-speaking Munsees, predominantly Esopus Indians.

Figure 1

Selection from a page in Evert Wendell's account book of the fur trade with Indians, Albany, New York, 1695–1726. The selected account is of a Mohawk woman, identified by her husband's name: 'Aeijwasee.'
Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society.

The section of the account reads, in part (translated): "Aeijwasee's wife[,] Debit[.] at the balancing of the accounts[,] she remained indebted[. . .] Ditto [,] she remains indebted on a stroud blanket[. . .] by her mother a blue coat[. . .] But she has paid on ditto one [beaver] July on a cask of rum [.] Beavers" [two pictographic renditions of beavers; crossed, indicating payment]. Published in *WAB*, 212.

INDIAN WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THE FUR TRADE

Careful tabulation and cross-referencing of these accounts demonstrates that women conducted a very large minority of these trade transactions. They participated in various ways. Some maintained accounts in their own name. Some arrived as part of a trading party with a husband or relative and were recorded in at least one of the transactions. Still others arrived as intermediaries in the trade with other natives. In 20 percent of the cases in the 1695–1726 Wendell account book, women were the main account holder. Even more strikingly, they were one of the active participants in very close to half of all accounts—49.6 percent.

The data from the Ulster County account book indicates that the large proportion of women in the Wendell trade was not an anomaly; the 1712–1732 Ulster book records gender representation virtually identical to that recorded by the Wendells.[14] Native women acted as main account holders on 22.2 percent of all accounts. By adding the instances in which they were active on other natives' accounts it appears that native women engaged in trade in 51 percent of all accounts in the Ulster ledger.[15] These data are presented in Table 1.

Although the appearance of a native woman in an account routinely comprised multiple transactions, we should note that this participation of women in about half the accounts does not mean that women did half the trading. The high figure for female participation refers to the number of *accounts* in which there was a woman involved. Since accounts often mentioned a number of individuals and multiple transactions, we need to investigate further and determine who traded *within* each account. This leads to a finding that in 24.9 percent of acquisition transactions women carried out the transaction either on their own account or on that of another Indian patron (see Table 3). For transactions leading to debt remit-

14. Besides Evert, the main scribent of that ledger, also his brother Harmanus and other relatives recorded transactions with native customers.

15. Combining the number of women's own accounts with the Ulster County trader (54) and those of other natives on which women actively participated (70), women were represented on 124 accounts of the total 243. The ways in which they appear in the accounts is telling: in the eighty-nine to ninety-two *instances* that document women trading on other Indians' accounts, the trader identified them as a client's wife (forty-five cases), daughter (eleven to fourteen cases), mother (nine cases), sister (three cases), niece (two cases) plus one man's "wife's daughter." The variation in the number of "daughters" trading on accounts of others stems from the fact that in three instances it is uncertain if one or two women appear as one woman's daughter(s), see *UCAB*, 148–49, 195–97.

Table 1

Percentage of accounts with participation by native women, by customers' origins. Albany, 1695–1726, and Ulster County, 1712–1732. (Albany: *n* of accounts=189; Ulster Co: *n* of accounts=243)

Albany, NY									Ulster Co., NY
Mahican	Mohawk	Oneida	Onondaga	Cayuga	Seneca	Canadian	Unknown	Total	Munsee
45.8	57.3	41.7	12.5	32.2	51.9	53.9	50	49.6	51.0

Sources: WAB and UCAB.

tances, a female participation rate of 31.5 can be established (see Table 4). Though it negates any notion of complete gender parity in the fur trade, the figure is still considerable. It shows that between a quarter and a third of the transactions at two different New York posts was conducted by a native female, either on her own account or that of another Indian patron of the merchants. Now that we have established that there are references to female traders in numerous accounts, what more can we detect about these long-hidden trading women?

WHAT DID THEY BUY?

Nearly four thousand transactions recorded in the two account books permit a detailed overview of the items that aboriginal customers purchased on credit from the traders in Albany and Ulster County, summarized in Table 2. As with all the data presented here, it records *numbers of transactions*, not the actual *volume of goods* that were traded.

Several observations can be made from the data in Table 2. First, trade concentrated on a rather narrow range of types of commodities. Together, acquisitions of textiles, alcohol, ammunition (lead and gunpowder) and "knives/axes/swords" constitute 87 percent of all acquisition transactions. Evidently customers concentrated on goods for household, fieldwork, or hunting. Food was traded in a limited number of instances but drink much more often. Rum and other alcoholic beverages may have been used for

Table 2

Instances of trade goods and services appearing in acquisition transactions on credit by Indians; absolute figures and percentages. Albany, 1695–1726, and Ulster County, 1712–1732, combined. (n = 3,840)

Category	Transactions	% of total n
1. Textiles	1,685	43.9
1.a Fabric	*949*	*24.7*
1.a Clothing[a]	*736*	*19.2*
2. Alcohol	952	24.8
3. Ammunition/trap	704	18.3
4. Knives/axes/sword	137	3.6
5. Money	72	1.9
6. Personal care/ beads/combs	71	1.9
7. Kettles/pipes/tools/ wire/pot/pan/bell	67	1.8
8. Foodstuffs	64	1.7
9. Fire-arms	35	.9
10. Repairs	20	.5
11. Tobacco	15	.4
12. Goat & deerskins/peltry	11	.3
13. Cards, Jew's-harp	4	.1
14. Silver, silverware	3	.1
Total	3,840	100.2[b]

[a] Includes shoes.

[b] The deviation from 100.0% is caused by the small number of some of the types of goods, and their effect on rounding off the percentages.

Sources: WAB and UCAB.

entertainment at social functions and possibly in rituals. Very heavy purchase incidence of textiles supports a scholarly consensus that "cloth was the most universally desired and generally useful [...] of all trade goods craved by Native Americans in the Northeast."[16] The patterns were similar in both locales, with slightly more instances of food acquisitions by natives in Ulster County, and more cases of Indians obtaining money or specie in Albany.[17] Another finding may reverse some gender expectations: men were the prevalent "impulse shoppers," more likely than women to buy a coveted gun, axe, or other item departing from the big ticket purchase of textiles or ammunition.

Since it is possible to determine on almost every occasion the sex of the Indian customer who made the purchase, we can present information on the participation of men and women in the trade of various types of commodities and services, as summarized in Table 3. A distinction is made between Indian men and women acting on their own account and native customers trading on the accounts of other Indians. Some differences between male and female behaviors emerge. Nearly 24 percent of transactions by native women were made on other people's accounts, compared to 7.8 percent of men's.[18] Overall, women were less likely than men to participate in transactions of items other than the two prime types of merchandise sold: women's acquisitions of textiles and alcohol together account for 84.3 percent of all transactions featuring women, either on their own account or someone else's; for men, this stands at 63.6 percent. Another variation comes out clearly in acquisitions of alcohol: 33.4 percent of all women's acquisitions show purchases of liquor and beer, whereas this is limited to 22.4 percent of men's transactions.

An alternate indication of significant female participation in transactions in which textiles exchanged hands can be identified. Standing at a

16. Marshall J. Becker, "Matchcoats: Cultural Conservatism and Change in One Aspect of Native American Clothing," *Ethnohistory*, 52:4 (2005): 727. Clothing was also among the types of trade goods most in demand among native groups in the Canadian hinterlands to the west.

17. Money or specie was listed as an acquisition in Albany in sixty-eight cases (3.8 percent of all acquisition transactions); only four transactions with Munsees featured such items (0.2 percent of all acquisition transactions). Food was acquired more often by Munsees (fifty-eight instances; 2.85 percent of all acquisition instances) than their Albany counterparts (six instances; 0.3 percent of all occurrences of acquisitions). Another differences existed. Munsees in Ulster County purchased textiles most often as untailored pieces of fabric (73.4 percent of all instances of textile acquisitions), while natives in Albany in most cases purchased garments (56.7 percent of all textile acquisition transactions).

18. For women, 225 out of 945 transactions (or 23.8 percent): 222 out of 2,851 for men.

Table 3

Instances of trade goods and services appearing in acquisition transactions on credit by Indian men and women. Number of transactions[1] and percentage within the category. Albany, 1695–1726, and Ulster County, 1712–1732, combined. (n=3,796)

Category	Total	♂, own accounts	♂, others' accounts	♀, own accounts	♀, others' accounts
1. Textiles	1,666	1,080 / 64.8	97 / 5.8	355 / 21.3	126 / 7.6
1.a Fabric	*938*	*618 / 65.9*	*57 / 6.1*	*193 / 20.6*	*70 / 7.5*
1.b Clothing	*728*	*462 / 63.5*	*40 / 5.5*	*162 / 22.3*	*56 / 7.7*
2. Alcohol	952	590 / 62.0	47 / 4.9	253 / 26.6	63 / 6.6
3. Ammunition	701	582 / 83.0	53 / 9.0	43 / 6.1	23 / 3.3
4. Knives/axes/etc.	135	102 / 75.6	12 / 8.9	13 / 9.6	8 / 5.9
5. Money or specie	72	52 / 72.2	1 / 1.4	19 / 26.4	0 / 0.0
6. Personal care/ wampum/beads	69	56 / 81.2	4 / 5.8	8 / 11.6	1 / 1.5
7. Kettles/pipes/ tools/wire	67	52 / 77.6	2 / 3.0	11 / 16.4	2 / 3.0
8. Foodstuffs	55	44 / 75.9	0 / 0.0	12 / 20.7	2 / 3.5
9. Fire-arms	33	30 / 90.9	3 / 9.1	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
10. Repairs	20	17 / 85.0	1 / 5.0	2 / 10.0	0 / 0.0
11. Tobacco	15	12 / 80.0	2 / 13.3	1 / 6.7	0 / 0.0
12. Goat & deerskins	9	7 / 77.7	0 / 0.0	2 / 22.2	0 / 0.0
13. Cards, Jew's-harp[a]	4	4 /100.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
14. Peltry[a]	2	1 / 50.0	0 / 0.0	1 / 50.0	0 / 0.0
Total	**3,796**	2,629 / 69.3	222 / 5.9	720 / 19.0	225 / 5.9
		♂ **2,851 / 75.1**		♀ **945 / 24.9**	

[1] Small variations appear between Table 2 and Tables 3 in the number of reported instances and the sequence of categories. Table 3 is limited to those cases where the Indians' sex could be determined. See the differing n of cases reported in the tables.
[a] Only in UCAB.

Sources: WAB and UCAB.

level of 28.9 percent of all such instances, it was somewhat higher than women's 24.9 percent participation rate in purchases overall. One historian has signaled the possibility that native preferences for clothing and textiles was an indication of women's "considerable input into decisions about the type of goods to be obtained in trade," since such acquisitions would reduce the amount of time and labor that they had to allocate to produce and mend clothing.[19]

Other variations appear as well. Women showed a much lower level of activity in terms of the number of times they purchased gunpowder and lead (9.4 percent of acquisitions of "ammunition") with similarly low levels of participation in knife, axe, and harpoon purchases. Perhaps more surprisingly, women were also not very active in acquiring pots, kettles, and related (predominantly metal) items. The number of times women acquired money and specie (27.9 percent of such acquisitions) slightly exceeded their overall involvement in transactions.

There were differences between Albany and Ulster County patterns. Ulster's Munsee women engaged to a smaller degree in the trade than did their Mahican and Iroquois counterparts in Albany. Their overall participation was 22.2 percent of such transactions, versus 28 percent in Albany. Munsee women were, however, unusually active in the trade in rum, beer, and cider. Both in relative and absolute terms, they were more frequent buyers than their Albany counterparts.[20] On the other hand, they appeared slightly less often in recorded purchases of textiles than native women trading with the Wendells in Albany.[21] Lastly, no Munsee woman was reported using money or specie.

PAYMENTS

Many debts remained outstanding during the years the books covered, but some were repaid. The two account books provide welcome detail on the types of products and services that native men and women delivered to the traders in full or partial debt remission. Table 4 provides aggregated

19. Dean L. Anderson, "The Flow of European Trade Goods into the Western Great Lakes Region, 1715–1760," in Jennifer S.H. Brown, W.J. Eccles, and Donald P. Heldman, eds., *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference. Mackinac Island, Michigan, 1991* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 93–115, quotation on 111.

20. 38.6 vs. 30.0 percent of acquisitions; 180 vs. 136 (grouped) transactions.

21. 26.1 vs. 28.9 percent.

information for Albany and Ulster County.[22] In the vast majority of cases, aboriginal customers remitted a part or all of their debts by delivering animal furs and skins. Together, these types of products constituted 80.8 percent of all transactions recorded as credit against debts. Wampum occurred as payment only in a very few cases, and these were restricted to Ulster County. Of some significance were foodstuffs and money or specie, but these categories represent only 11.1 percent of all transactions in which debt was remitted. Labor and other services were supplied predominantly by Munsees, most often by means of work in agriculture (twenty-six instances); the total for both groups represents 5.6 percent of all transactions.

Other differences exist in the ways that natives reduced debts in the two localities. In Albany, they delivered skins and hides (for example, elk and deer) as payment only on a few occasions, whereas such deliveries occurred most often as payment farther south in Ulster County (4.5 percent vs. 40.2 percent of all transactions reducing debt). Conversely, various types of furs (for example, beaver and marten) were dominant in the instances where Mahican and Iroquois customers paid the Wendells in Albany, who catered to customers in the northern borderlands and into Canada. Ulster's Munsees, on the other hand, supplied them at a considerably lower frequency (38.6 percent in Ulster County vs. 78.5 percent in Albany).

Honing in on gender differences in terms of payment types, it becomes apparent that these are less pronounced than gendered variations in purchases. The two main categories of native payment (furs and skins and hides) appear in payment transactions almost at the same rate among men as for women (81.7 percent of men's transactions overall; 78.8 percent of women's). Some dissimilarities occur. It appears that women were less likely to participate in purchases of goods and services on credit (24.9 percent of such acquisitions) than to participate in paying off debts (31.5 percent of these instances), and they were relatively strongly inclined to pay those debts in money and specie (43.6 percent of such transactions). In absolute numbers, women were most likely to make payments with furs (170 out of 535 transactions by both sexes) and skins (61 out of 217). Women's share of recorded payments with foodstuffs is only slightly more substantial than their overall rate of participation (34.4 vs. 31.5 percent). This category con-

22. For a listing of the number of times that specific types of furs were used to calculate debts of and payments by Indians who traded in Albany (n=2,387), see *WAB*, 55, Table 9.

Table 4

Instances of labor and products appearing in payment transaction by Indian men and women. Number of transactions and percentage within the category. Albany, 1695–1726, and Ulster County, 1712–1732, combined. (n=931)

Category	Total	♂, own accounts	♂, others' accounts	♀, own accounts	♀, others' accounts
1. Furs	535	342 / 62.9	23 / 4.3	152 / 28.4	18 / 3.4
2. Skins, hides	217	152 / 70.1	4 / 1.8	50 / 23.0	11 / 5.1
3. Foodstuffs	64	39 / 60.9	3 / 4.7	20 / 31.3	2 / 3.1
4. Labor, services	52	35 / 67.3	0 / 0.0	16 / 30.8	1 / 1.9
5. Money or specie	39	22 / 56.4	0 / 0.0	17 / 43.6	0 / 0.0
6. Animal products[a]	10	6 / 60.0	0 / 0.0	4 / 40.0	0 / 0.0
7. Wampum[b]	6	4 / 66.7	0 / 0.0	2 / 33.3	0 / 0.0
8. Canoes[a]	4	4 /100.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
9. Fire-arms[b]	3	3 /100.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
10. Pipes[b]	1	1 /100.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
Total	**931**	608 / 65.3	30 / 3.2	261 / 28.0	32 / 3.4
		♂ **638 / 68.5**		♀ **293 / 31.5**	

[a] Only in UCAB.
[b] Only in WAB.

Sources: WAB and UCAB.

sisted only to a small degree of payments in corn; most recorded deliveries consisted of various types of meat. Many women delivered non-agricultural products, ones associated with the forests rather than the clearings.

The account books also indicate that the customers generally settled only a part of their debts. In Ulster County, they fully paid their debts on 52 percent of the accounts, while 38.3 percent of the accounts showed no payments and 9.7 percent contained partial payments only. The Mahican

and Iroquois customers of the Wendells performed considerably worse in this respect. In Albany, participants from differing aboriginal groups fully paid only between 20 to 29.5 percent of their debts during the years the account book covered. While the number of accounts in Albany that were paid in part was considerably higher (varying between 21.3 and 47.8 percent among different ethnic groupings), they also left more accounts fully unpaid.[23]

Women in particular roles in the fur trade

Indigenous women embraced certain specialized trade functions, which also emerge in the ledgers as more gender-neutral than previously assumed. They acted as intermediaries in trade of their kin and others with the traders in Albany and Ulster County. In both localities, account holders escorted other natives to the traders' stores and in some cases they acted as guarantors for debt which the other customers incurred. In Albany, women acted as escorts in 50 percent of the overall thirty-seven or thirty-eight recorded instances. This share was even larger in Ulster County (55.5 or 62.5 percent), but the total number of cases there was limited to eight or nine. Mahicans and Mohawks also performed the role of guarantors sixteen times in Albany; women performed this role in 37.5 percent of all such cases. In Ulster County only one Munsee was recorded as a guarantor; he acted as such when another native man purchased a gun. In general, escorters and guarantors provided their services in transactions by individuals of their own sex and ethnicity.

The Wendells in Albany on twenty occasions remarked on natives carrying goods away from the store on commission with the intent to sell them outside of Albany. Such journeys were often directed to Canada, sometimes to "the Ottawas." Half of those commissioned traders were women.[24] In another suggestion of native mobility, Evert Wendell or his brother Harmanus noted sixteen times that a customer was "staying" or "trading" at another merchant in Albany at the time they came to trade at their outlet. Forty percent of those who were mentioned on one or more occasions in this manner were women.[25]

23. *WAB*, 60, Table 11.
24. The Munsees, who were recorded in this fashion (only five times in total), were all men.
25. The trader in Ulster County made no observations of this kind.

The records reveal a few further pieces of information about female traders. On twenty-one occasions, Mohawks and Mahicans engaged in trade with the Wendells "in the country." Such transactions occurred most often in trade with women (53 percent of all transactions). Some native women were quite often involved in exchanges "in the country": both 'Catri(e)n, Watcaro(o/s)'s sister' and 'Marijae, Canosedeckhaa's wife' each appear three times as trading with the Wendells outside the town's perimeters. One additional transaction specified that a Mohawk woman was instructed to pay her debt in Schenectady.[26] Eleven times, the Wendells recorded that they had supplied their customers with a "bill," presumably summarizing the latter's trade balance. In two cases, these customers were women (18.2 percent).[27] The traders in both Albany and Ulster requested that some of their customers deposit a security or pawn; in about one out of every four cases, this involved women.[28] Finally, the account book from Ulster County shows that Indian women provided labor to remit debt in six out of the total of thirty-two cases (18.8 percent).[29]

NATIVE WOMEN'S OBSCURITY

Since scholars have been studying the fur trade ever since Francis Parkman's day, readers who find our data persuasive might remain somewhat puzzled about why we are only now discovering the remarkable range of indigenous female activity. Part of the reason is that these Dutch-language accounts have not received much attention. There is, however, a more fundamental reason. These women were seldom honored with a name. The records required very close reading and attention to context to allow us to identify a number of them as repeat customers. Why did the colonial businessmen neglect to call even major female traders by their names?

Dutch New Yorkers were products of their cultures, and those cultures placed greater importance on men as the formal economic and legal heads of families, regardless of their own Dutch wives' engagement in farms and

26. *WAB*, 174. It refers to an account of an unnamed Mohawk woman, probably in June 1707. The Ulster County trader recorded no transaction as taking place "in the country."

27. The one occurrence of this phenomenon in the account book from Ulster County involved a male; the unnamed son of the Esopus man 'Pansogh'. See *UCAB*, 139.

28. In Albany, five out of eighteen cases, or 27.8 percent; two out of eight, or 25 percent, in Ulster.

29. The percentage excludes the category of 'travel elsewhere.' The Wendells in Albany recorded no similar labor-debt exchanges.

businesses.[30] In addition, men may have simply been more collegial with others of their own sex. Merchants perpetuated gender bias in the way they kept their records, even when the indigenous traders themselves came from non-patriarchal cultures and had no such prejudice against female political or economic agency.[31] Women traders, no matter how numerous or autonomous, were far less likely to be recorded with their own names than men were; they were very commonly identified as the wife, sister, or mother of a male, or with some such identifier such as "the limping female savage," who also brought her "husband from Canada" to participate in trade on her account.[32] The Wendells recorded trade with forty-one or forty-two separate individuals without stating their names. The pronouns used, or labels such as "his mother," indicate that all but three of these unnamed traders were women.[33] While husbands, fathers, and sons were named, women were recorded as relatives, obscuring their identity in the records from the day they arrived with their furs. It is small wonder that scholars have overlooked them. We hope that our work contributes to establishing their identity, their numbers, and their persistence over time as traders.

Conclusion

This examination of two New York Dutch account books has revealed indigenous women traders in a significant proportion of ongoing trade accounts in both Albany and in Ulster County in the late seventeenth cen-

30. Another example of this female invisibility in colonial records is the obscuring of the active part women of the Wendell family itself apparently played in the family's Albany trade. See *WAB*, 10, 37, 74n12. On legal rights and commercial activities of married Dutch women see David Narrett, *Inheritance and Family Life in Colonial New York* (Ithaca, 1992). On continental Dutch practices see Danielle van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship: Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands c. 1580–1815* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007). In-depth study of the papers of the Dutch New Yorker Maria van Rensselaer has recently resulted in Kim Todt and Martha D. Shattuck, "Capable Entrepreneurs: The Women Merchants and Traders of New Netherland," in W. Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, eds., *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 183–214.

31. The classic source for the remarkable political powers of Iroquois women is Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages Amériquains comparées aux moeurs des premieres temps* (2 vols., Paris, 1724), I. On Iroquois women as mediators of cultural exchange and diplomacy, see Daniel Richter, "Cultural Brokers and Intercultural Politics: New York-Iroquois Relations, 1664–1701," *Journal of American History*, 75 (1988), 40–67; Nancy L. Hagedorn, "'A Friend to go Between Them': The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740–70," *Ethnohistory*, 35:1 (1988): 60–80. On eighteenth-century Delaware women as peacekeepers on native and interracial stages, see Fur, *Nation of Women*, 196–98.

32. *WAB*, 133.

33. This represents 92.5 to 93 percent of those individuals. For the same tendency of the Ulster County trader, see note 15 above.

tury and the first third of the eighteenth century. They appear in half of the accounts, and they conduct more than a quarter of all transactions. A key discovery is that the findings were so similar in two different locales, adding to the likelihood that this was common practice, rather than an anomaly. There were nearly identical levels of activity in the two different operations located in different counties. Not confined to any one group, they involved both Iroquoian and Algonquian nations. Moreover, these female traders persisted during all four decades recorded, from 1695 through 1732. Here is consistent, quantifiable evidence that scholars have been seeking. It provides a solid basis on which to update the masculine persona that dominates much of our thinking about native participants in the fur trade. At least in some colonial New York marketplaces, fur and peltry transactions were carried out by people of both sexes.

This study is certainly not the last word. Our study of these trade account books may allow researchers to build on our findings, designing (digital) projects that may be able to measure not just the types but also the *volume* of trade goods purchased by men and women of various aboriginal groups. There is much to discover. Did steady, long-term indigenous customers conduct themselves differently from occasional ones? What can these records—in which family members emerge so clearly—reveal about aboriginal kin networks, a topic many scholars are now pursuing?[34] The fact that rates and conditions governing exchanges of some of the staple goods in these ledgers hardly changed over time also warrants closer study. These records are sufficiently rich to open a door on a whole new understanding of a fur trade which included women, both as members as families and as independent traders. Many were geographically mobile, independent traders who were familiar with the use of currency and debt. In surprising numbers, they abandoned the clearings and set out through the forest, bringing furs and other goods to the counters of trade in colonial New York.

34. See for example Heidi Bohaker, "Nindoodemag: The Significance of Algonquian Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 63:1 (2006): 23–52 and Susan Sleeper-Smith, "Women, Kin and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade," in R. Kugel and L.E. Murphy, eds., *Native Women's History in Eastern North America Before 1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 203–33.