

Report on the June 8th presentation of the AWAD-program, Albany NY

Preparation

In March 2006 I was asked to organize the New Netherlands AWAD-presentation of the Spring/Summer-meeting in that year. Consequently in a meeting with Janny Venema (representative of the New Netherland Project), Jaap Jacobs (independent researcher) and Hans Krabbendam (Roosevelt Institute) a general outline for a presentation in Albany, on the basis of the AWAD-PowerPoint presentation as provided by Han Jordaan, was discussed and established. We decided that in all possibility an afternoon meeting previous to the NNI/AANS conference of June 9th and 10th would suffice to present the AWAD-program and to find time for a discussion. In this way it would be possible to use the presence of people already attending that conference.

Next, Janny Venema and I made a list of institutions, organizations and individuals that might be interested in attending the AWAD-meeting. Janny was familiar with some names and addresses and the remainder were traced by the internet addresses of institutions or organizations. All in all the original list of names contained 18 names. An invitation was drafted and sent to all addressees by e-mail.

After two weeks only a handful of reactions were received in return. It looked as if there was little interest in the proposed meeting. After conferring with Janny Venema, I asked Charles Gehring of the NNI/NNP, to help and intervene in order to make things work. He started to contact various people right away and within two days I received sufficient reactions to decide that the meeting would go on. To those who had reacted positively I offered on behalf of the AWAD-project a lunch in a nearby restaurant.

The practical organisation of the meeting such as a proper meeting room, a possibility to show the PowerPoint-presentation and access to the internet was taken care of by the NNI.

Presentation

On the 8th of June at 13.00 hours I opened the meeting at the 11th floor of the Cultural Education Center, where 15 people were in attendance. (see inset 1)

After welcoming everybody and thanking them for their efforts to be present I started my presentation. In it I tried to emphasize the importance of an Atlantic Network of people and organizations that are of interest to the Atlantic History. I also tried to point out that all of the attendants could profit from such a network by:

- using it as an source of information on developments and projects within the Atlantic World
- using it as a means to advertise one 's own projects
- using it as a means to establish contacts between possible future partners
- using it in order to organize and approach possible means of funding for projects

After pointing out the possibilities of the AWAD – program it was time to start the discussion and or react to questions. I have included here the most relevant questions and remarks made by the attendants.

Reactions/suggestions

- Who is updating the database, and how will we know that this will be done in the future?
- We would very much like to see bibliographies included in the AWAD-website
- Why is Belgium not included in this program? After all, the first inhabitants of New York were of Belgian ancestry
- Is it possible to ask questions about certain projects by way of a sort of bulletin-board, and if so, is it possible to develop a system in which by way of a peer-review, information related to projects can be exchanged?
- How is the project going to deal with the various ways in which countries catalogize their inventories? For example, there are different ways to catalogue an inventory of a museum or a library. Now, how are we going to find a way to make such inventories accessible to users of this website?
- Is there a sort of standard for the abstracts of the participant-institutions and organizations? In other words: what do we tell the visitors of the website about ourselves?
- There must be websites that likewise deal with other countries that have an Atlantic background. Countries like Germany or Sweden or perhaps Great Britain could or already have developed a similar project. Will these projects be linked to the AWAD
- Is it clear which target group this project is aimed at? Are we dealing with genealogists or with academics?
- The project – as related to New Netherland - should not stop at the 1664 take-over by the British. After that event, Dutch influence on developments in the USA did not stop
- How is the project dealing with the 2009 Fulton-Champlain-Hudson organisation? Is there a possibility for us to join that project?

Some of these questions I could – sometimes with the help of Jaap Jacobs – answer instantly. Others I have referred to the November meeting in Amsterdam. E.g., the question about international standards in use for cataloguing content.

I have asked the attendants to react further in writing to the presentation. In it attendants can express their view on the project and also propose possible topics that have to be dealt with in the November-meeting.

Further contacts

Although the meeting in itself did not last very long, it gave me the opportunity to make direct contacts with the attendants. I also attended the NNI/NNP Conference the following days and this gave me a further possibility to enlarge the knowledge about the AWAD-program with other attendants. I also met the Dutch Consul for Press and Cultural Affairs, Mrs. Gabriella Sancisi, who is interested in the AWAD-Project and has asked to be kept informed.

Conclusion

I find it very difficult to grade the results of the AWAD-presentation on June the 8th. Generally speaking, the attendants reacted favourably on the project. I conclude the meeting in a modest optimistic mood. I have urged the attendants to react in writing so that we will have enough items to discuss in the November –meeting. I also pointed out that an invitation for the November-meeting is subject to the way reactions are sent forward. All in all just one contribution by Jean Ashton was received. (see inset 2)

Although this might all look a bit disappointing I still feel that on the whole the trip was a modest success. I would like to invite the following persons to attend the November-meeting.

- 1) Jean Ashton – The New York Historical Society
- 2) Chuck Fisher – NY State Museum
- 3) Charles Gehring NNP

Amsterdam July 2006

Dirk J. Tang.

Report on Meeting of Librarians and Curators to discuss the AWAD project
New York State Archives
June 8, 2006

The meeting of the AWAD group in Albany on June 8 was useful insofar as it brought together for the first time representatives of the major institutions in the New York area who have extensive holdings in the history of New Netherlands and its impact.

I was happy to hear about the AWAD website and its many resources. As Director of a research library that focuses on local and regional history, I was particularly interested in knowing about the availability of resources for the study of the influence of Netherlandish history and culture. As the site develops, our reference librarians and researchers, who include local academics as well as genealogists and other casual users, will be pleased to realize that they can access international databases and research projects that will help provide context for their own work.

Provision of this contextual richness is probably the most important contribution that AWAD can make to scholarship, since it is all too common to look at projects and problems from a narrow regional or local perspective, which can distort interpretations. The subject of slavery – used several times as an example on Thursday afternoon – is particularly subject to misinterpretation when international commonalities and variations are ignored. As we discussed, for this reason it is essential to provide some “vetting” of content or quality control in order to be certain that the highest standards of accuracy are maintained.

One other feature which I look forward to seeing on AWAD is a “current activities” page. It was clear, for example, even from the brief discussions held at the meeting, that coordination is lacking among the various institutions who are planning celebrations of Hudson’s first voyage. Having a central place to post this information and to disseminate it to institutions both locally and in the other Atlantic locations mentioned will enable project directors and curators to avoid overlap and even to plan linked or collaborative activities for 2009.

I was pleased to participate in the meeting and look forward to learning about the site and project as they develop.

Jean Ashton
Vice President and Library Director
The New-York Historical Society