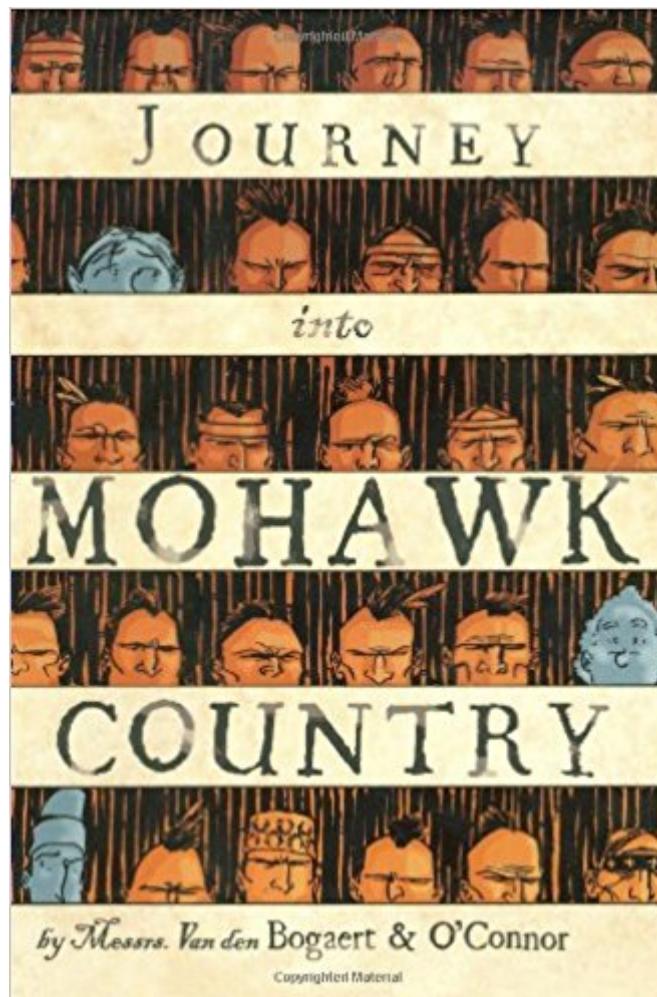


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# Journey Into Mohawk Country



## **Synopsis**

Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert was only twenty three when he ventured into Mohawk territory in search of the answers to some pressing questions: where were all the beaver skins that the Indians should have been shipping down the river? Was the money that should have been going into the pockets of the Dutch going to the French instead? Despite freezing temperatures and a scarcity of trustworthy guides, maps, and sometimes even food, Harmen van den Bogaert and his friends set off for a journey through old New York in an attempt to revive the struggling fur trade. Nearly four centuries later, George O'Connor brings Harmen van den Bogaert's journal of his travels to life with simple and striking artwork.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: First Second; 1st edition (September 5, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1596431067

ISBN-13: 978-1596431065

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 216.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #532,863 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Comics & Graphic Novels > History #57 in Books > Teens > Education & Reference > History > United States > Colonial & Revolutionary Periods #208 in Books > Teens > Biographies > Historical

Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

O'Connor, writer and illustrator of the entertaining children's book *Kapow!* puts pictures to the actual diary entries of Dutch trader Van den Bogaert, who set off through New York's Indian territory in 1634, searching for a source of valuable beaver pelts. More than simply illustrating the account, O'Connor fills it with a new life--expanding on ideas only touched upon, creating action and conflict, and casting some welcome humor into the Dutchman's somewhat dry original commentary. While not exactly fast paced, the odyssey is filled with unusual details and insights about the Native Americans--the frequency of bear meat in their diet, their practice of treating certain illness by

vomiting on the patient, their attitudes toward the foreigners. O'Connor himself seems well versed on the subject, and his pictures conjure an authentic sense of a sparse and demanding landscape as they offer a glimpse into a lost culture. The diary is absent of racism, but there is a single frame of nudity and a bloodless depiction of a scalping. Jesse KarpCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

First Second goes to Mohawk Country - By Kate Culkin First Second, Henry Holt/Roaring Brook's graphic novel imprint, continues to push the boundaries of graphic literature with George O'Connor's Journey into Mohawk Country, a book-length comics adaptation of a 16th-century Dutch trader's diary. Journey will debut in September with an initial print run of about 15,000 copies, and First Second editorial director Mark Siegel sees it as a groundbreaking effort that will earn praise as an unusual comics work and as a work of history. "It is an important historical journal, with wonderful art by O'Connor," he says. Journey tells the story of Harmen Meyndertsz von den Bogaert, who in 1634 traveled from Fort Orange (present-day Albany) with two companions deep into Mohawk Indian territory to forge a new trade agreement for beaver pelts on behalf of the Dutch West India Company. Their efforts helped ensure the survival of New Netherland, which included what is now Manhattan, thus shaping the history of New York City and North America. In an interview with PWCW, debut graphic novel artist O'Connor explains that he learned of von den Bogaert while reading Russell Shorto's Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan, the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America (Vintage). He then sought out William Staarna and Charles Gehring's translation of the journal. His subsequent research included sketching hundreds of artifacts in museums: "Basically, anyplace that had some time-appropriate collections of Iroquois artifacts, I dropped by." "Doing Journey into Mohawk Country was like scratching an itch I didn't know I had," says O'Connor, author of the popular children's books Kapow!, Kersplash (both S&S Children's) and Sally and the Some-thing (Roaring Brook). The final product represents an impressive collaboration among O'Connor, Siegel and colorist Hilary Sycamore. O'Connor's first draft presented realistic but dry renderings of the journal's events. Siegel encouraged the artist to portray the emotion and humor of the Dutchman's experience, while keeping his words intact. O'Connor believes he ultimately grasped the "soul of the story," which is "the tale of these three young men sent into the wilderness of North America, with really no preparation or support to speak of, and how the experience transformed them." Sycamore's rich palette of browns, yellows, and purples is critical to the book's emotional resonance, and O'Connor praises her talent and her patience: "She would endure these long conversations with me, filled with many pointless diversions

and trivia I had picked up, as I explained what I hoped she could accomplish with the color, and she would come back with something even better than I had envisioned." "O'Connor," says Siegel, "is a very good self-promoter. He used to work at [Manhattan children's bookstore] Books of Wonder, and knows a lot of people and a lot of places." The author will tour Hudson Valley bookstores in the fall. First Second featured the book prominently in its displays at the MoCCA Art Festival, San Diego Comic-Con and American Library Association, and will feature it at the New York Comic-Con as well; copies were distributed at Book Expo. Material from the hundreds of sketchbooks O'Connor created will be posted on the First Second Web site ([www.firstsecondbooks.com/](http://www.firstsecondbooks.com/)). First Second is hoping Journey's story and illustrations will appeal to a wide audience, particularly history buffs, librarians, teachers and young adults, as well as fans of innovative graphic novels. "The whole thing can be read in many different ways by different people," notes Siegel. Gene Luen Yang, a high school teacher and the author of *American Born Chinese*, also on First Second's fall list, is creating a teacher's guide for the book. Historical works are an important part of First Second's publishing plans. "The graphic novel can be such a lovely way to work with history, because there are some things you can really pick up with the text, and some with the illustrations, without either weighing the material down," Siegel believes. The prominent historian Catherine Clinton is currently working with the artist Tanitoc on two projects for the company: *Booth*, about John Wilkes Booth, and another with the working title *Constitution*. Working on Journey has been satisfying experience for O'Connor, but he's back working on children's picture books. Siegel says he is now working on a book called *Uncle Bigfoot* for Roaring Brook, about a boy who believes his uncle is a sasquatch, and spent six months in Southern Europe researching ideas for a graphic novel that will draw on the elements of Greco-Roman mythology. As for his hopes for Journey, his first graphic novel, O'Connor says, "I really hope that *Journey into Mohawk Country* really turns a lot of people onto this amazing and almost completely overlooked period of history. • • Publisher's Weekly O'Connor's graphic novel is an example of the kind of work that will engage younger teens and spark interest in a potentially dull and little-known segment of American History. Based on the 1634 journal of Dutch trader Harmen Meynderstz van den Bogaert, this describes his venture into what is now the state of New York. The 23-year-old interacted with Native American tribes, establishing trust in order to acquire wildly popular beaver pelts used in European hat-making. O'Connor incorporates rich browns and blues against a black backdrop in the work's panels that include both interior and exterior scenes. Readers can almost feel the extreme cold and the harsh conditions of the region. The tribes' lifestyles are presented favorably and their customs enhanced by the artwork. Several facial expressions are presented with exaggerated juvenile quirkiness,

making the work's interest level as definitely middle-school. Though the price tag is high for the format, the book's quality ensures its place in studies of pre-Revolutionary America.â •

â •Kirkusâ œO'Connor, writer and illustrator of the entertaining children's book *Kapow!*, puts pictures to the actual diary entries of Dutch trader Van den Bogaert, who set off through New York's Indian territory in 1634, searching for a source of valuable beaver pelts. More than simply illustrating the account, O'Connor fills it with a new life, expanding on ideas only touched upon, creating action and conflict, casting some welcome humor into the Dutchman's somewhat dry original commentary.

While not exactly fast paced, the odyssey is filled with unusual facts of Native American life, like the frequency of bear meat in their diets, the strange practice of curing certain sicknesses by vomiting on the patient, and peculiar combination of both serving and being bemused by foreigners.

O'Connor himself seems well versed on the subject, and his pictures conjure an authentic sense of a sparse and demanding landscape as they offer a glimpse into a lost culture. The diary is absent of racism, but there is a single frame of nudity and a bloodless depiction of a scalping.â •â •Jesse

Karp, Booklistâ œIn 1634, an employee of the Dutch West India Company volunteered to find out the reason beaver-pelt trade at Fort Orange (present-day Albany) was taking a nose-dive. Bogaert and two companions, Willem and Jeromus, took a six-week journey to meet with their former Indian suppliers and learn the truth behind rumors of the new trading alliance that seemed to be

undercutting business. O'Connor takes Bogaert's terse record of the journey and creates not only a literal pictorial rendering of their adventures in graphic novel format but fleshes it out with credible, if speculative, subplots that play out only in the full-color sequential art. Graphic novel format is, admittedly, an unusual choice for reproducing a colonial document, but O'Connor brings it off with panache. Working within the comic book idiom, star-of-his-own-story Bogaert is the bright-eyed, Doonesbury-esque sharp guy, his sidekicks are tall-and-lean and short-and-round, and most of the workaday Indians encountered are heavy-browed and solemn, except when they're snickering or forehead-slapping over the white guys' ineptitude on the trail. Arenias, the Sinneken leader who ultimately saves their financial bacon and guides them back to Fort Orange, gets the role of superhero with his pumped-up muscles, brilliant-toothed smile, unshakable benevolence, and possession of the beautiful, loving wife whom Bogaert has been lusting after. O'Connor's particular skill lies in taking a snippet of the translated historical journal (e.g., "We came at one hour into the evening to a cabin one half mile from the first castle. No one was there but women") and, while remaining true to the known course of events, launching a visual back story (e.g., in which Willem gets himself a girlfriend) rife with humor or tension. The 1634 encounter captures a moment in early Indian/white contact when, although disease had insinuated itself into native communities, the two

racers still met as equals at the pelt bargaining table, confused and skeptical of each other's customs, but knowing a good deal when they saw one. Notes on geography and sources are included, as is a glossary of terms. • The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books • From December 11, 1634, to January 21, 1635, Dutch trader Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert traveled one hundred miles from Fort Orange, on the tip of what is now known as Manhattan, into the heart of the Mohawk tribe. The French had begun butting into the Dutch beaver pelt trade, and van den Bogaert and his friends needed to protect their market to prevent the failure of the colony. During the trip van den Bogaert kept a journal, unabridged and unaltered except for the translation, that O'Connor uses as the basis for the book. O'Connor handles his duties well in his first graphic-format rendering. His pictures are funny and interesting and keep the flow of the book going. Starna and Gehring's translation is easy to read, while still retaining the work's old-fashioned flavor. A glossary at the back of the book helps with Dutch or Mohawk words that could be confusing, although most questions are answered by the illustrations. The main problem with placing this title in nonfiction is that O'Connor's interpretations of the action could be taken as what actually happened as opposed to an artist's liberty. The book is a good choice for libraries looking for something different for their graphic novel shelves, but it should be paired with the original work or other book on the history of New Amsterdam colony in order to get the full picture of the times. •

• Snow Wildsmith, VOYA • This is an adaptation of the journal of Harman Meyndertsantsz van den Bogaert, a Dutch barber-surgeon. In December 1634, he and two companions journeyed into upstate New York. Their mission: forge new trade agreements with the Indian tribes in the area. In the 1630s, beaver hats were all the rage in Europe, so beaver pelts were of vital importance to the small settlement of New Amsterdam. The Dutchmen traveled from village to village, dining on such delicacies as beaver meat, beans lathered in bear grease and cooked pumpkin. They watched a village play war games, saw how Indian healing worked (the doctors thrust sticks down their throats and vomited on the patient), and attempted to buy a tame bear. Since they journeyed in the heart of the winter, there was a lot of snow. Journey Into Mohawk Country is a good choice for graphic novel collections with an educational emphasis. Bogaert's journal provides a wealth of interesting historical details, but in itself is rather dry reading. It is left to O'Connor to fill in the details, which he does by creating visual gags, giving his protagonists personalities they probably didn't possess, and making up stories that didn't happen--for instance, Willem Tomassen (one of the Dutchmen) gets a girlfriend. Journey Into Mohawk Country contains mild comic book violence and is recommended for junior high and high school graphic novel collections. • KLIATT

Journey into Mohawk Country is based on a journal by H.M. Van den Bogaert with illustrations by George O'Connor. The diary served as a wonderful focal point for this graphic treatment. Written in the graphic novel style, the book follows a dutch trader who leaves Manhattan Island to explore Indian country in the winter of 1634. The young man meets with various Indian groups, trades tools and weapons for fur and food, and learns about the native cultures. This well-researched book attempts to illustrate the adventure with authentic visuals that reflect the time period and cultures represented, while still making the work accessible to young people. The author takes some liberties in interpreting the journal's references to some issues. For instance, when the author refers to the lack of privacy in some villages, the illustrator shows the frustrations Bogaert probably felt about the lack of toilet facilities. This book serves as an excellent model for anyone wishing to convert an historical text into an engaging graphic reading experience. Teachers should find it particularly useful in stimulating interest in this time period. As usual, First Second have succeeded in publishing another outstanding graphic work for all ages.

"Journey into Mohawk Country" is a splendid graphic novel. I enjoyed the stylized artwork as well as the way that the artist interpreted Bogaert's 17th Century report concerning his travels to the lands of the Iroquois Confederacy. There is a lot packed into each frame. I read this book six times within the course of one day, and each time that I read it, I noticed something that I had missed earlier. The artist is able to express a lot of activity and even conversations with surprisingly sparse writing to accompany it. All in all, an excellent book. I would be very interested if George O'Connor did even more colonial-era graphic novels.

Ordered for a school library. Excellent book, story and transaction. Thank you.

This graphic novel was a great buy; I cannot believe the level of storytelling achieved using a simple journal as a skeleton. Anyone who enjoys this period in American history or historical graphic novels in general will probably be glad that they gave it a chance; I happen to enjoy both, so this book was a home run.

I had gotten this for history class, but honestly I would read this even if it wasn't for the class. It's a very nice book done in a comic strip style. Very pleasing to read. Quick too.

This comic book adaptation from an 18th century journal is ideal to get kids interested in the

Mohawk tribe. Beautiful drawings.

When I first heard about this, I didn't know what to think. A graphic novel made from a 17th century journal. But it works. Wonderfully illustrated. A great way to learn about a moment in our country's history and have a good time doing it.

This is exactly the book that I need and it came in the same condition as the seller described

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