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# Some Jersey Dutch Genealogy

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An Address at the Annual Meeting of the Genealogical  
Society of Pennsylvania, at Philadelphia,  
March 5, 1906.

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*By* WILLIAM NELSON

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## Some Jersey Dutch Genealogy.

It was a little Jersey Dutch girl at Paterson who, when she went to school and was asked by her teacher the nativity of her parents, replied that they were Dutch. "High Dutch, or Low Dutch?" queried the teacher. The little girl, with a certain mistaken pride, answered, "*High* Dutch, of course." Your true Hollander would think it a waste of time to argue that the Nederlander—the Lowlander—is as good as the High Dutchman—if not a little better, with his centuries of as glorious history as is written in the annals of Time. The original white settlers of the present Bergen and Passaic counties, in New Jersey, were, with scarcely an exception, from Holland, and their descendants to this day give a marked tone to the communities in those counties, and have materially affected the public spirit in the adjacent counties of Morris and Essex, while Hudson county still feels the influence of its original Dutch population, as in the days when it was generally known as Bergen. It may interest you to hear something of the experiences of those who investigate the genealogies of these old Jersey Dutch families. But first let me say a word about the language. The older survivors of the descendants of the first settlers still adhere to a speaking knowledge of the tongue brought over by the seventeenth-century immigrants from the Netherlands, but I have never met one who could read it, altho they often produce with pride and a certain puzzled air, the ancient, huge Dutch Bible, in vast folio, bound in oak boards half an inch thick, covered with leather, and held together with enormous brass clasps and corner pieces. This language seems, from a comparison with the older Dutch dictionaries, to be substantially the

same as that spoken by the original settlers, with the ordinary variations of dialect according to the Province from which the immigrant came. Natives of New Jersey, accustomed to the Jersey Dutch language, have found it quite easy to make themselves understood in Holland today.

Forty years ago the language was commonly spoken on the streets, in the market place and in the shops of Paterson. Now, it is seldom heard. The earlier church records, of course, are all written in Dutch. To interpret them it is well to use a dictionary of date contemporary with the records, the better to get the meaning, and to find the same spelling—for Holland, with all her conservatism, adopted a simplified spelling something like eighty years ago.

#### CHURCH RECORDS.

I know of no Church records in New Jersey or elsewhere to compare with those kept by the earliest clergymen of the Reformed Dutch churches of New York and New Jersey. In New York, as you are of course aware, the records of the Dutch church reach back to 1630, and are remarkably full and complete. The records of the Reformed Dutch church of Bergen (now Jersey City) extend back to 1661; Hackensack, to 1686, and Acquackanonk (now First Reformed, Passaic), to 1726. The records in these New Jersey churches are all kept in substantially the same form. In the case of marriages, for example, they are arranged thus:

1697	Elyas Bartely, j. m.	geb. Nieuw England
April 17	Cornelia Cornelise, j. d.	geb. an de Bouwerij
April 24	David De Maree, j. m.	geb. Nieuw Haarlem
	Sara Berthold, j. d.	geb. Sluijs, Vlaanderen
1699	Siaque Vigoor, wedr. van Catryn Pisiaer	
April 8	Neeltje Buys, wed. van Jan Koerte	

Sept. 28 Heer Rynier Van Gysse, wedr. van Directie Cornelisse van  
Groenland  
Hendricktie Buys, wed. van Cornelis Verwey.

You would not want much fuller genealogical data than those, would you?

The baptismal records are likewise a joy to the searcher. They give the names of the father, the full maiden name of the mother, name of the child, date of baptism, and names of the godparents or witnesses. Often the date of the birth of the child is also given, and frequently other information. Here is a sample from the Hackensack church records:

1696		
Roelof	Maerten Powelse	Roelof Westerveldt en
Dec. 27	Margritie Westerveldt	moeder Geesie Westerveldt
1697		
Jaquemintie	David, zoon van Jan DeMaree	Jan Pieterse
Sept.	Antie Sloth	Jan DeMaree de jonge
		Abeltie Pieterse Sloth
1699		
David	David DeMaree, zoon van David	Samuel DeMaree
Jan. 15	Sara Berthoff	Rachel Karson, zyn
		grootmoeder.

Here you have the full names of the parents, and in several cases even of some of the grandparents.

It is amusing to observe the difficulties of those old Dutch Dominies in their wrestling with the strange spelling of French, English and Scottish names, for the sounds of which there were no precise equivalents in the Dutch. "Siaque," for instance, was an attempt to give the sound of the French Jacques. But one of the worst efforts was the name "Tsjems Tsjansen," entered in the Hackensack baptismal register in 1726. You would have to put yourself in the place of the Dutch Dominie, and try to utter the

singular name, "James Johnson," with no letters to render the sound of "J."

You have noticed that the full maiden name of the mother is given in the above baptismal records. The Dutch girl never lost her name, never merged it in that of her husband. All through life she was known by her maiden name, as Marritje Van Rypen, wife of Dirck Van Houten. So it was in the church records; so it was in legal instruments; so it was on her bedding; and when she went on to join her ancestors, it was thus inscribed on her tombstone. Moreover, in the earlier days she usually added to her baptismal name her father's name, with the genitive affix, "se," so that you will often find the woman's name, all through life, Marritje Dirckse Van Houten, meaning that she was Mary, daughter of Dirck Van Houten. How immensely helpful this is to the genealogist. I think it means, too, that these Jersey Dutch mothers felt a full sense of their dignity and importance, and believed they had at least an equal share in all the responsibilities of the family.

#### PERPETUATION OF CHRISTIAN NAMES.

Another custom of the Jersey Dutch people is also of great assistance to the student of family history. It was the rule to name the first son after his paternal grandfather, the second after his father, the third after his maternal grandfather, and the fourth, fifth, sixth, and so on, after his uncles on both sides. Similarly, the girls were named, the first, after her maternal grandmother, the second after her mother, the third after the paternal grandmother, and the rest after her aunts. I say this was the rule, although like most rules, it was frequently deviated from. But with this practice in mind, and observing the names of the persons present at the baptism of a child, it is comparatively easy, in most cases, to identify the parentage of father and



mother, for in each baptism you have three generations linked together.

So persistent has this custom been, that wherever you find the Christian name Adrian, you may be sure you can trace the bearer back to Captain Adrian Post, who came to Staten Island in 1650; the name Ralph is invariably due to Roelof Cornelissen, the ancestor of the Van Houtens; all the Ryniers get their name from Rynier Van Giesen, who came to New Netherland in 1656; all the Gerrits owe their name to Gerrit Gerritsen, who came over in 1660; nearly all the Michaels are indebted for their name to Michiel Janse, who settled at Renselaerswyck in 1636, and ten years later removed to Bergen; all the Hartmans derive their name from his wife, Pytie Hartmans; wherever you find the name Waling, which is no longer often, you may be sure its owner descends from Waling Jacobs, born in 1651; in the Van Winkle family you will find the name Simon or Simeon, after the progenitor of the family, dating back to 1655 and earlier. Edo is a persistent family name among the Merselises; Uriah comes from the ancestor of the Van Ripers, who was known as Uriaen Thomasse. The student of the history of these old Dutch families acquires a sort of instinctive knowledge of the ancestry of a person, as soon as he hears the names of his parents.

#### THE PATRONYMIC PUZZLE.

I have spoken thus briefly of some of the remarkable helps to the genealogist in the customs of these people. The amateur will find much difficulty, on the other hand, in trying to trace the descendants of some of the first settlers. You are familiar here in Pennsylvania, with the Swedish and Welsh fashion of using patronymics, instead of surnames. This usage was prevalent among the first settlers of New Amsterdam, as surnames were still comparatively unknown in Europe in their day.

Thus, one of the patentees of Acquackanonk, in 1685 (the territory now occupied in part by the cities of Paterson and Passaic, and by the township of Acquackanonk), was Hendrick Joris, meaning simply Henry, son of George. He and his descendants took the name Blinkerhoff, now written Brinkerhoff.

Gerrit Gerritse, already mentioned, was simply Gerrit, son of Gerrit. Many of his descendants to this day are still known as Garrison, while others took the name van Wageningen, after the village in Holland from which he came, their name being usually now written Van Wagoner. An explanation of this change, evidently manufactured to account for the fact, is this: Peter Gerritse had a son Gerrit, known by his neighbors as "Pietem's Gat," to distinguish him from the countless other Gerrits, or "Gats." Moreover, "Pietem's Gat" was also known as "Spyker-kop Gat," or "Nail-Headed Gat," meaning that his head was as hard as nails, and his disposition likewise. He had a dispute with his brothers and sisters about the division of some land, and straightway vowed that he would no longer use their family name, but would thenceforth be known only as Gerrit Van Wageningen. And so his descendants are called to this day.

Jacob Waling's three children, baptized from 1650 to 1655, were known as Jacobse, although the third, Symon Jacobse, wrote his name Symon Van Winkel, in making his will in 1722, presumably because his father came from the village of Winkel in Holland.

I have already spoken of the children of Michiel Jansen, who were known as Michielsens, or son of Michiel. Elias Michielsens was a member of the East Jersey Assembly for several years, and by the Scotch clerk his name was recorded in the proceedings as Elias M'Kilson, from which you would inevitably jump to the conclusion that he was a

good Scotchman. In the third generation the family took the name Vreeland, probably from a Holland village of that name, from which, perhaps, Michiel Jansen may have come. Michiel had a number of sons, and their progeny was also numerous, so that to distinguish the several stocks it was customary, until within half a century, to add to a son's name the name, initial, or abbreviation of his father's name: thus, John J. Vreeland meant John son of John Vreeland; John Ja. Vreeland, or Elias Ja. Vreeland indicated to the initiated that a son of Jacob Vreeland was meant; to make it still clearer we sometimes find John Ja. El. Vreeland, meaning John son of Jacob son of Elias Vreeland. And I assure you, that if you had occasion to search the title to some of the Vreeland lands, and they cover many broad acres in the present cities of Paterson and Passaic, you could not be too grateful for these helps to identify the descent of the owners.

Hessel Pieterse's descendants had less disposition to change, and from generation to generation simply rung the variations—Pieter Hesselse, Hessel Pieterse, Pieter Hesselse, Hessel Pieterse.

Reyer Reyerse had sons Adriaen, Marten, etc. Some of Adrian's children have always retained the name Adrianse, or Adriance; some of Marten's children took the name Martense, while the other descendants of Reyer Reyerse are known as Ryerson, and a widespread family they are, in the United States and Canada.

Uriaen Thomasse was another of the Acquackanonk patentees; he was from Rypen, in North Jutland, and hence most of his descendants took the name Van Rypen, now usually written Van Riper. But the patronymic practice persisted for several generations in this family. On one occasion I was puzzled for a long time in tracing the title to a tract of land which I knew had come down from the

Van Ripers, but to my surprise I found that in 1771 it was devised by one Cornelis Aeltse, and I could not find how or when Cornelis Aeltse had acquired it, either by purchase or by descent. At last it occurred to me that Cornelis Aeltse was the son of Aelt Van Riper, who had devised this property to his son Cornelis Van Riper.

#### SOME LOST LINKS.

This name Uriaen reminds me of the curious transformations these odd Dutch names often undergo. Uriaen is evidently the equivalent of the Scriptural Uriah; but in Dutch it is pronounced Yurrie, and by an easy gradation this is frequently turned into Yerry, Jerry, and Jeremiah. Again, Yerrey's son would be called Yerreanse, and presently you have Yereance, a numerous family in Northern New Jersey.

These misinterpretations of names often lead to too hasty generalizations or inferences. In Sussex county, New Jersey, and in Orange county, New York, you will find the name Forgerson. "Evidently the Scotch Ferguson," you say. Not so, but from the Dutch Volkert, whence Volkertsen, and by an easy transition, through the permutation of consonants, Volkerson, Folgerson, Forgerson.

In the classic days of Holland it was quite common for scholarly men to translate their Dutch names into Latin or Greek, Erasmus being a famous example. So we have the names Marinus and Goetschius among the Dutch dominies of the eighteenth century, and the name Oblenus in the present. But you will generally find the latter painted or written after the Irish fashion, with a big O, an apostrophe, and a big B, as if it were Celtic, and not good old Latin-Dutch. It reminds me of a talented Polish music teacher we had a few years ago in Paterson, named Oborski. On one occasion a musical programme was printed, on which his name appeared as director. The local printer having been

accustomed to the name O'Blenus thought Oborski was of the same origin, and carefully set it up in type, "O'Borski." Whereat the wrath of the noble Pole was not soothed until he had thundered forth on the piano sundry selections from Wagner—something, I believe, like the *Götterdämmerung*, but minus a few syllables.

I was once hunting up a Van Houten family, and at last found a very intelligent old lady of that particular ilk. When other data had been duly exacted I came back to my difficulty: "Your grandfather had a daughter Vrowetje," said I; "I have the record of her baptism, but nothing more." She smiled; "Vrowetje was my mother," she remarked. "But I thought you said your mother was *Fanny* Van Houten." "And so she was," and again she smiled at my bewilderment. "You see, it was this way; when my mother went to school the teacher was an Englishman, and he could not twist his tongue around that big mouthful, and so he told my mother he would enter her name on the roll as Fanny, which, he said, was the English for Vrowetje." As a matter of fact, Vrowetje means "little woman," and is a Dutch term of endearment, often given to children in baptism. I think it is sometimes mistaken in the records for "Vrontje," the "short" for Sophronia.

Another puzzle came about in this wise: Dirck Van Houten, who died in 1812, had a number of children, among them Adriaen; he grew up and was married, as I found by the church record, but after that he disappeared. Some years later there was a deed from the children of Dirck Van Houten, and among them there was no Adriaen, but there was an Aaron, and it transpired beyond a doubt that Adriaen had changed his name to Aaron, evidently to avoid the confusion arising from the existence of a score or so of Van Houtens of the same baptismal name.

Running through the northern part of Paterson is a

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pretty stream tumbling down over the mountains, and at last flowing through one of our parks ere it merges into the Passaic river. This stream was known by the Dutch as the Krakeel Val, or "quarreling brook," perhaps the "brawling brook." But in our day it is only known as "the Molly Ann Brook" and thereby hangs a tale, which shall be made brief. This park was formerly part of the Van Houten domain. Here lived the widow Van Houten, Molly, and she had a son, Adriaen, who was called Yawn for short; and because of his mother's strength of character, and to distinguish him from other Yawns, he was usually called "Molly's Yawn." When his mother died the brook aforesaid flowing through his lands was called "Molly's Yawn's Brook." It is an amusing illustration of the simplicity of the olden days, and is an instance also of how easy it is to lose the sense of a name.

Here is another problem: Hans Speer and Tunis Speer are common names. They settled among the Peers, who also have Hans and Tunis as ordinary Christian names. How was the Dominie or the Church clerk to make the nice distinction between Hans Speer and Hans Peer, or between Tunis Speer and Tunis Peer? Can you? I have no doubt they were often confounded in the records.

Then, we have in our neighborhood the name Berry, and the name Brádbury, with intermarriages between them. One might easily jump to the conclusion that the name is the same; but not so. Further, there are two families named Berry among us: one descended from Captain John Berry, who came from Barbadoes, in the West Indies, and the other, which appears to be of Dutch origin, coming from Flushing, in Holland.

I have spoken of the Dutch use of patronymics. Who would suppose that the Andersons, of Trenton and vicinity, were of Dutch descent? Yet they are undoubtedly de-

scended from Andries Jochem, an early settler of New Amsterdam. And there is a Johnson family, of New Jersey, whom you would certainly take to be of New England stock; but they trace their ancestry to Rut Jansen, or Roger son of John, who located in Somerset county early in the eighteenth century.

In the records of Somerset county and of New Brunswick you will find two Cornelis Lows mentioned about 1750. You will naturally infer that the references are to the same man. On closer inquiry you find that one of the men was a surveyor, and the other a lawyer. Tracing the matter still further you will learn that one of these men is descended from a Long Island family, and the other from an Ulster county family, their respective progenitors not being in the slightest degree akin, and not having the name Low at all. One of these families pronounces the name Low, as in the adjective so spelled, and the other is called Low, sounded as in the second syllable of *alloy*.

Captain Adriaen Post, of whom I have spoken, had three children whose names we have not learned. There happened to be two or three other men named Post in New Amsterdam, about his time, who might have been his children, and some genealogists, with that tender regard we all have for orphans, have kindly fathered these misplaced Posts upon the Captain, without the slightest evidence of his responsibility for them. They have even gone so far as to assign to him the parentage of one Jan Jansen, simply because at one time he carried the mail, and hence was called Jan Jansen Postmael, from which circumstance his descendants assumed the name Post, according to family tradition. But Captain Adriaen Post was one of the few immigrants to the New Netherlands, as early as 1650, who already had a surname, and did not acquire it by any fortuitous circumstance in the new world.

A member of the Degray family—prominent and numerous just north of Paterson for several generations—once assured me that his ancestors came from Scotland, and previously from France, whence the prefix "De," and he was greatly surprised when I showed him the will of his great-grandfather, Johannes *de Graauw*, unmistakably Dutch, and signifying "the gray." The name "De Groot" is also Dutch, simply meaning "the large," or "great." "Devoe," pronounced "Devoo," is undoubtedly French, the earlier spelling having been "Deveaux," with various modifications. The Demarest family are exceedingly numerous in Bergen County. In the older writings the name is frequently spelled "Demaray," which represents the pronunciation of the original name, "de Marais" or "de Maretz," as the primitive French ancestor was called. Then we have the name of one of the original settlers of New Brunswick, Cornelius Longfield, apparently an Englishman, but when we trace the name back to the earliest spelling, it appears as "Cornelis Langeveldt," manifestly Dutch. Laroe is the Dutch spelling for La Rue, another Frenchman.

#### THEIR PIETY.

I have given you some idea of the pleasures, the conveniences, and the puzzles experienced in tracing Jersey Dutch ancestry. You will pardon me if I say something of their characteristics.

They were a God-fearing people, constant in their church-going. "All the great ages have been ages of belief," says Emerson. These men and women had the strongest kind of faith in the doctrines of the church. When those who assumed to be more orthodox than the rest led the great Seceder movement in 1827, the lines between the old and the new schools were so strictly drawn that fathers and children would not speak to each other, so intensely did they believe. A more kindly exhibition was their scrupu-



lous care to keep the Poor-Chest of the church well supplied. The pious formula of their wills was not peculiar to them, but I think it correctly described their views of death and of the resurrection, as in the will of Nicholas Vreeland, in 1757:

"I Nicholas Vreeland being in health of body and in perfect mind and memory blessed be God therefor and calling to mind the mortality of my body and knowing it is appointed for all men once to die do make and ordain this my last will and testament. First, I recommend my immortal spirit in the hands of my great Creator trusting in the merits of my blessed Saviour for pardon and remission of my sins and a happy admission in the regions of bliss and immortality."

And who can but be touched by the simple faith expressed, though often crudely, on their tombstones? As for example:

When overwhelmed with grief  
My heart within me dies,  
Helpless and far from all on earth  
To heaven I lift mine eyes.

And this composite injunction, somewhat haltingly expressed:

Go home my wife and children dear  
For I am not dead but sleeping here,  
Afflictions here long time I bore  
Physicians were all in vain  
I will remain here till Christ appears  
To meet in heaven again.

The commoner version reads thus:

Afflictions sore long time he bore  
Physicians were in vain,  
Till God alone did hear him moan  
And eas'd him of his pain.

Another tombstone states in pleasing fulness :

"He died from the kick of a horse."

And adds with pious resignation :

"This is the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes."

The following is strictly impersonal :

This world is vain  
And full of pain,  
And grief and trouble sore  
But they are blest  
Who are at rest,  
With Christ forevermore.

The stonecutter had difficulties with this :

Dear friends who live to mourn and weep  
behold the grave wherein i sleep,  
prepare for death for you must dei  
and be intombd, as well as i

Verily, as Macterlink says :

"The Angel of Sorrow can speak every language—there is not a word but she knows."

In another churchyard, a few miles from Paterson, is a tombstone of granite, in two sections, one inscribed with the name of the husband, and the other with that of his wife, and beneath, running under both, is the affecting and suggestive scriptural quotation, slightly modified :

*We have fought a good fight.*

In the same yard, I am told, but I have not seen it, is a couplet which tells a whole story :

I came up here to see my mother  
Death took me instead of another.

There is a gratifying particularity of historical detail, combined with attention to rhyme and rhythm, on a tombstone at Belleville:

Sacred to the memory of Jacob Perrine  
Who died April 13th in the year 1739  
He died from a blast in the Copper Mine.

And what a tragedy in that other inscription in the same churchyard, chronicling the drowning of a lad of eight years:

In vain were all attempts to save  
From sinking in a watery grave,  
But now his spirit swims above  
In rivers of delight and love,  
Secure from every wave of woe  
Where deadly streams can never flow.

One cannot help thinking--what a pity he did not learn to swim while here!

#### ANTI-RACE SUICIDE.

These old Jersey Dutch people had none of the fears of Malthus and their practice certainly shows that they were opposed to race suicide. Symon Jacobse Van Winkel, baptized in 1655, and who died in 1732, left twelve children him surviving. One of his sons, Simeon, had twenty children, of whom thirteen survived their father. It is related that he carved their initials and dates of birth on his doorposts, and when they ran out he carved the rest on a broad smooth stone in the front of the house. And what a roll-call that must have been when he summoned his brood at dusk, to see that none were lost, strayed or stolen—Abraham, Johannes, Simeon, Jacob, Antie, Feytie, Saertje, Trijntje, Rachel, Jenneke, Leena, Marregrietje, Geertje, and others who died young.

A simple calculation shows that in the tenth generation back a man's ancestors will number 1,024, provided there have been no intermarriages. I think most of the Jersey Dutch people of Passaic and Bergen counties today can trace their ancestry to at least six or eight of the fourteen Patentees of 1685, and I am sure that in a large percentage of cases their ancestors in the tenth generation would not number one hundred persons. This reduces the appalling immensity of the task which we have estimated confronts the genealogist.

#### PERSISTENCY OF THE TYPE.

There are many descendants of the original settlers who still live on the ancestral acres, greatly shorn, it is true, but they cling to them with the love of the farmer for the land. All thro' Bergen and Passaic counties may be seen the old type of low stone house, often with eaves projecting far out, so as to form a roof for a broad veranda. Usually the old houses were one story in height, with spacious, open attic. The people usually stay with the old church, and they keep up many of the old customs. They are a sturdy stock, and none is more valued in Northern New Jersey.

The original settlers, with scarcely an exception, were of the plain common people—peasant farmers or artisans. I have never found any evidences among them that they were entitled to bear arms in the mother country—I mean in the heraldic sense. No one who has read a page of the history of that splendid nation doubts that its people proved their right and their willingness to bear militant arms in its defence. But very seldom indeed have I found any indication that the Jersey Dutch people were at all disposed to patronize the coat-of-arms manufacturer. They are content to know that their ancestors were of good, clean, decent stock, and they are proud of their origin.

Macaulay has said that a people which takes no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants.

From my own experience, I am sure that the Genealogist will find no pleasanter field for research, and no worthier subject, than the original Jersey Dutch and their descendants.

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