

INTRODUCTION

Pieter Claesen, founder of the Wyckoff family in America, came to Fort Orange (now Albany, NY), Province of New Netherlands, April 7, 1637 on the ship Rensselaerwick. The log of this ship contains the following: “This ship sailed from Amsterdam, Holland, 25 Sept. 1636, anchored off the seaport, The Texel, on 8 Oct. 1636, reached New Amsterdam, New Netherland, 4 March 1637, and Tuesday, 7 April 1637, about three o'clock in the morning we came to anchor before foort aeranien, the end of our journey upward.”

The Rensselaerwick was outfitted by Killian Van Rensselaer, a diamond merchant of Amsterdam, who had a speculative contract with the West India Company for the grant of a large body of land near the headwaters of the Hudson River under which he was required to transport men and animals to the new country. There is no complete list of passengers on this ship, but among those named are Pieter Cornelissen from Monnickendam, North Holland; Pieter Claesen Van Norden, and Simon Walischez. These three did not remain in New Amsterdam but went on to Fort Orange. Here Pieter Cornelissen became prominent in the affairs of the colony. He may have been an uncle of Pieter Claesen, although the two are not mentioned together in the records of the Van Rensselaer estate.

These records show that Pieter Claesen was one of the thirty-eight laborers sent on the Rensselaerwick to be assigned to various farms on the Van Rensselaer estate and that under the date 3 April 1637, he was assigned to Simon Walischez. According to a scorched fragment of the records of the estate, saved from a fire in the State Library at Albany in 1911, he was to receive 50 guilders per year for the first three years and 75 guilders for the last three years. About the time the contract matured Simon Walischez's lease was cancelled on the grounds that he was an unsatisfactory tenant and the final settlement was made by the Van Rensselaer estate. [See Hoppin, *Washington Ancestry and Forty Other Families*, Vol. III, page 103].

According to the report, Pieter Claesen was 18 years old when he made his settlement with the Van Rensselaer estate. Soon after this he rented a farm for himself and married Grietje Van Ness, the daughter of a prominent citizen of the colony. Their two eldest children were born in Rensselaerwick (also shown as Beverwick) but the church in which records were kept of their birth and the marriage of their parents was burned and the records destroyed. With his wife and two children Pieter went to New Amsterdam in 1649. There he remained until 1655 when he signed a contract “to superintend the Bowery and cattle of Peter Stuyvesant in New Amersfoort” and moved into the house on Canarsie Lane in Flatlands, Brooklyn, now known as the Wyckoff Homestead.

Pieter Claesen prospered and became one of the most influential citizens of the little frontier settlement. He had bought land in that section in 1652, and continued to buy land from time to time, but he never owned the house in which he lived. He became a local judge, something like our justice of the peace, and was influential in establishing the Flatlands Dutch Reformed Church at the juncture of Flatbush Avenue and King's Highway. His remains are said to have been buried in land now covered by the altar of this church. The Wyckoff Association in America planted a tree in the churchyard of this edifice on May 22, 1938 in memory of Pieter and his descendants. On May 26, 1940 the association unveiled a bronze tablet inside the church inscribed in his honor.

When the British took over the Dutch colony they had difficulty with the Dutch names and demanded that the families take surnames by which they could be identified. It was then that the name Wyckoff came into use in this country. In a roll of those who took the oath of allegiance in Kings County in 1687, the names of Pieter Claesen and his six sons appear with the surname Wijckoff. There are several conjectures as to the origin of this name. One is that since Pieter had been a local judge and the word “Wyk” in Dutch means parish and “hof” means court, his name would then mean “of the town court”. A member of the Wyckoff family wandering through a Dutch town during World War II discovered the name on a place of business, which suggests that the name may have been taken because of some old world association. Dr. Max Wickhoff of Vienna, Austria, writes that his family came from Friesland in the 17th century and he believes that the Austrian Wickhoffs and the American Wyckoffs derive from the same Friesian gentry living in the Austrian Netherlands, which then comprised a large part of Holland, Belgium, and East Friesland. He also refers to the house in the

province of Drente which is called Hof in der Wijk or Wijkof. "Hof" in this case would mean house or farmstead and "Wijk" would designate the locality. [See Hoppin, *Washington Ancestry And Forty Other Families*, Vol. III, page 122.] There can be no certainty as to which, if any, explanation is correct.

There are many spellings of the name (67 known) but the original spelling is Wijckoff. The other spellings have arisen from carelessness, illegible writing, personal choice and probably several other reasons.

Pieter Claesen and his wife, Grietje Van Ness, had eleven children, 6 boys and 5 girls, all of whom married and had families. The Wyckoff family had a high standing in the Dutch colony as is shown by the families into which they married. All were families of some importance. Grietje, the mother of this great family, should also have consideration, as she contributed much to the family. Even among the Dutch of that time there were distinctions of station and she ranked high. Many of the plain people carried no family name, only names from the old Dutch tradition of patronymic origin. (Pieter Claesen meaning Pieter son of Claes etc.). Others of apparently higher social standing carried a family name from generation to generation. Grietje was of this latter class. She was the daughter of Cornelis Hendrick Van Ness and Maycke Hendrieux van der Burchgraeff. Cornelis was the son of Hendrick Adriense van der Burchgraeff and Annetje Janse of Laeckervelt, Holland. The will of Annetje Jans (widow of Hendrick Adriens) divides her estate between her son and her daughter Maycke and provides that Maycke will divide her own estate among her six children. Thus Grietje, when she married Pieter Claesen, brought him wealth as well as rank. Cornelis Van Ness, son of Hendrick was doubtless a native of the village of Nes on the Island of Ameland in the province of Friesland, North Holland. He later lived in Vianen near Utrecht in South Holland, which was the home of Killian Van Rensselaer. Cornelis and his wife Maycke came to Rensselaerwick on the Hudson River in August 1641. He was a man of education and ability and was influential in the affairs of the colony. He owned a farm near Greenbush but was no farmer. His main income was from his brewery and his mercantile and political activities. He and his son-in-law Pieter Claesen engaged in prolonged controversy with Van Slichtenhorst, the autocratic director of the colony, which ended when Pieter left the colony in June 1649 and Van Slichtenhorst was arrested on April 18, 1652 by order of Pieter Stuyvesant, director of the colony. [See Hoppin, *Washington Ancestry* Vol. III and A.J.F. Van Laer.] Considering the prominence of Cornelis Van Ness, one can but wonder what old world connection between the two families there may have been which led to the marriage of Grietje and Pieter, who had so recently been a laborer. Her superior education and rank must have been of immense importance to her young husband when he took up his new duties in Amersfoort. Offspring of Pieter Claesen and Gretje Van Ness were:

Nicholas	born about 1646 at Beverwyck, NY *
Margrietje	born 1648 at Beverwyck, NY
Annetje	chr Nov 27, 1650 at New Amsterdam
Mayken	chr Oct. 19, 1653 at New Amsterdam
Willemptje	born about 1654 at Amersfoort, NY
Cornelius	born about 1656 at Amersfoort, NY
Hendrick	born about 1658 **
Geertje	born about 1660 at Flatlands, NY
Garret	born 1662 at Flatlands, NY
Marten	born 1663 at Flatlands, NY
Jan	born Feb 16, 1665 at Amersfoort, NY

* Records of the marriage of Pieter & Grietje as well as births of first two children destroyed by fire when the church at Beverwyck burned.

** Hendrick was married twice, to a Geertje and a Helena. Records show purchase of 3 shrouds for children purchased from the Flatlands Dutch Church between 1686 & 1712. No surviving children. Estate was left to Johannes Willemsen, grandson of his sister, Mayken.

The following pages trace the history of these offspring through the many generations, some lines reaching into the year 2004 thus representing a span of 367 years from the date of Pieter's arrival in this country. Hopefully we will continue to fill in the gaps and add new generations to this remarkable family.