

Dutch Mennonite Historical Genealogy

De Veer: Five Centuries of History

Calmeyer's Original de Veer Genealogical Research

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My paternal grandmother, Margaret (Schapansky) Teichroeb was a descendant of one of the oldest Dutch Mennonite families to have been researched and documented. Margaret was the great granddaughter of Maria de Fehr and Johann Dyck. Maria was the great granddaughter of Benjamin de Fehr (ca. 1733 – ca. 1822), the patriarch of all the de Veer descendants in Russia and subsequently in Canada. Maria had a number of fascinating ancestors - she was also the great granddaughter of Johann Bartsch, one of the two emissaries sent by the Danzig Mennonite community in 1787 to investigate the offer of farmland in Russia by the administration of Catherine the Great.

Benjamin's place in the ancestral lineage of the de Veer family is a story with uncertainties and twists that will be described later in this article.

Genealogical researchers studying the de Veer family tend, whether they know it or not, to rely on information published in 1967 in *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, a well-regarded Dutch genealogical publication. That year a detailed genealogy of the de Veer family authored by M. R. H. Calmeyer, J. H. de Veer and J. F. van West de Veer appeared in this publication. However, what is less widely known is that some 40 years before this work was published, Calmeyer had self-published his own research in a volume entitled "*De Geschiedenis van het Geslacht de Veer van 1556 – 1929*" (*De Veer History 1556 – 1929*). I acquired a copy of this rare document and in this article will present selected content, translated, and paraphrased, for researchers interested in the original work done by this pioneer of de Veer genealogy.

Michael R. H. Calmeyer (11 June 1895. Hellevoetsluis Netherlands – 7 March 1990, 's-Gravenhage Netherlands) was an officer in the Dutch army at the time his research was first published. He was a son of Johan Hendrik Calmeyer and Jane Ann de Veer.

The following content is translated from Calmeyer's genealogical publication, with my own observations in parentheses.

Introduction

In August 1917 I began to assemble a genealogical list of my mother's family based on such notes as I was able to obtain from prior generations, held in the possession of G. S. de Veer-Mollinger in 's-Gravenhage Netherlands. I also collected information from a publication entitled "Stam en Wapenboek van significant Nederlandsche Familien" written by A. A. Vorsterman van Oyen. The latter material contained some errors. I was also assisted by A. Bredius and A. W. van der Vies in Amsterdam and H. G. Mannhardt in Danzig. *[ed. Mannhardt was the author of "The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569 – 1919" among other publications.]*

There are references to individuals carrying the de Veer name in various cities throughout the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and although these individuals may bear the same name this does not confer a familial relationship. The family I wish to focus on had its origins in Schiedam.

Genealogy

The earliest generations of the Schiedam de Veer family were Mennonite merchants who traded primarily with the Baltic countries and the Dutch colonies that emigrants had established by the sixteenth century. The de Veer family played an important role in the establishment of the Mennonite community in Danzig and the family moved between Amsterdam and Danzig with ease. *[ed. Apparently, they alternated between the cities as needed for*

commercial and religious reasons and demonstrated a level of international geographic mobility that citizens of the twenty-first century might not have expected in a population living 500 years ago.]

In the following description of the social and political circumstances that led to the Mennonite migration to Danzig I have used work by Mannhardt as a source for this historical account.

Centuries before the Reformation the trade route between Amsterdam and Danzig had been important and Dutch merchants knew the city of Danzig well. Fleeing from persecution in the early years of the reform movement, around 1530, Dutch protestants, Anabaptists among them, sought refuge in Danzig. From the perspective of the citizens of Danzig the view of the immigrants was mixed. The economic opportunities were obvious – these were immigrants from a well-developed country, where people were known to be industrious and innovative, and respected for their commercial and agricultural knowledge. However, the Anabaptists carried a stigma, being associated with the failed uprising of 1535 in Amsterdam when a group of extremists attempted to take control of the city. The Anabaptist rejection of infant baptism was a further concern, and the general suspicion among the citizens of Danzig was that behind the peaceful Mennonite exterior resided a population harboring evil intent. Caution prevailed. Mennonites were not permitted to live within the city of Danzig but were permitted to settle in the suburban villages. More specifically, the Mennonites were not permitted to keep women in the city. The Mennonites did themselves no favors either. In adherence to their principle to not swear oaths, they would not take the requisite citizenship oath and thereby caused their own exclusion from Danzig citizenship. Instead, they formed their own social communities, preventing intermarriage and establishing their own rules and customs. *[ed. This might have been restrictive economically and socially, but it might also have enabled the preservation of customs and language that in some ways still define the Dutch Mennonite ethnic group.]*

Generation 1.

Gysbert Jansz de Veer. Gysbert was born in Schiedam on 14 May 1556, and he died in Danzig on 17 May 1615. His father was Jan de Veer. Gysbert married Debora Claesdr Harnasveger in 1580, probably in Amsterdam. He settled in Danzig and is mentioned as one of the first members of the Dutch Mennonite Congregation there. Around 1600 he returned to Amsterdam to take up formal citizenship on 5 October 1601. In the following years his name appears several times in legal documents as a merchant in Amsterdam. He returned to Danzig between 1612 and 1615. One brother of Debora, Frans Clasen Harnasveger, was a merchant in Amsterdam. The children of this marriage were Nicolaes (2.1), Abraham (2.2), Anneke (2.3), Jacob (2.4), Hans (2.5) and Gysbert (2.6).

Generation 2.

2.1 Nicolaes. This branch of the family was the most socially prominent one in Amsterdam in the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. Nicolaes' descendants belonged to a small circle of very wealthy Mennonite merchant families, all closely related through marriage. The male line of this branch ended around 1750, discontinuing the de Veer name among Nicolaes' descendants.

Nicolaes was born in March 1583, probably in Amsterdam, and died there on 8 September 1646. He married Margaretha Loten in Amsterdam on 23 August 1603. She was the daughter of Dirck Nicolaesz Loten and his unidentified wife, the daughter of a van Assenborgh. Dirck was a brewer, merchant, and mayor in Aardenburg. A Mennonite, Dirck fled Aardenburg for Leiden to avoid religious persecution. *[ed. Aardenburg is a city 100 miles southwest of Amsterdam near the Belgian border. Leiden is 20 miles southwest of Amsterdam.]* Margaretha Loten died in Amsterdam on 5 November 1611. Nicolaes married again in Amsterdam on 3 March 1612 to Anna Jacobsdr Kotermans, born in Dordrecht. *[ed. Dordrecht is 40 miles south of Amsterdam.]*

Nicolaes was a very wealthy merchant and Baltic trader as well as a teacher in the Mennonite congregation in Amsterdam. In 1608 he bought a house within Amsterdam, but until at least 1612 he lived in a house he had built on the

Oude Schans on the Waal. *[ed. The Oudeschans is in the eastern part of Amsterdam; I infer that when Nicolaes lived there it was essentially a suburban locale in relation to the very center of Amsterdam.]* In August 1619 he purchased a country estate called "Rustenburgh", overlooking the Amstel River. *[ed. It is difficult to know where this was located.]* On 10 June 1623, his father-in-law, Dirck Loten, died in Leiden and left Nicolaes a tremendous inheritance. In 1626 he traveled to Frederickstadt in the region of Holstein in Denmark, where a Dutch colony had been founded in 1623 by emigrating Remonstrants. *[ed. In 1621 Duke Friedrich III, son of Duke Johann Adolf of Holstein-Gottorp and Princess Augusta of Denmark, convinced Dutch Mennonites and Remonstrants to invest in the area in exchange for religious freedom. Presumably Nicolaes was an investor.]* By 1628 he had returned to Amsterdam. In 1646 he became ill while at his country estate and was taken back to his house in Amsterdam, where he died.

2.2 Abraham. This branch continues to the present with descendants in the Netherlands and colonies, as well as in the United States of North America. The first three generations were merchants and subsequent descendants served the State as colonial officials, judges, and military officers. They also left the Mennonite church.

[ed. For Mennonite genealogical purposes Abraham is a particularly significant ancestor because the DNA of one of his direct descendants, a grandson of Eduard De Veer (born in 1893 in Aruba), has been matched to the DNA of descendants of Benjamin De Fehr (1733 – 1822), the patriarch of the de Veer family members who migrated to Russia.]

Abraham was a merchant and Baltic trader. He is mentioned in commercial documents in Amsterdam and various Baltic Sea sites. In one document dated 28 July 1632 he appointed as his agent his elder brother Nicolaes and later in that year traveled abroad. He married Catharina Pasch. The children of this marriage were Jacob, Cornelis, Hans, Debora, Sara, Anna, Elisabeth, Gysbert, Pieter and Abraham. *[ed. for the purpose of this article I will focus on the family line of his son Pieter.]*

Abraham's son Pieter was born in Amsterdam in 1631 and died there in 1699.

Pieter had a son, also named Pieter, born in Amsterdam in 1666. He died there in 1714. He was a jewelry merchant.

Pieter the younger had a son, Abraham, born in Amsterdam in 1703. He died there in 1795. He was a jewelry merchant like his father.

Abraham had a son, Johannes, born in Amsterdam in 1738. He died in Curacao in 1796. According to family tradition he lived in France briefly and was involved in several duels, with much bloodshed, after which it was decided that he should go to Curacao as an accountant for the West India Company. In 1763 he married the daughter of the colonial secretary of Curacao. His wife died and he married the daughter of the former governor of Sint Eustatius. In 1782 Johannes was appointed governor of Curacao.

His administration occurred in a turbulent era. The revolutionary spirit which stirred Europe into a turmoil also manifested itself in the West Indies, originating in the French Isles. As early as 1789 the Curacao administration had to prohibit the wearing of freedom symbols and the singing of freedom songs. Strict controls were placed on the lower strata of the population in 1790 and tightened further the following year. The discontent spread to the colony's slaves and those who sought to liberate them among the white population.

De Veer defended the crown and the historical social structure and made bitter enemies among the revolutionaries. In 1795 several violent clashes arose between the garrison and rebellious citizens and among citizen groups themselves. On 17 August 1795, a slave revolt erupted [*ed. The Curacao Slave Revolt of 1795*], causing considerable damage to fixed property, including the French Embassy, and de Veer sent the military to stop it. The result was more violence. De Veer assigned Rear Admiral Wiertsz to quell the rebellion. On 10 July 1796 an officer was murdered, and the rebellion was put down violently. [*ed. The slave revolt was put down and the leaders were executed, mercilessly and publicly, at least one by torture.*]

Concurrent with the end of the rebellion de Veer made public his intention to step down from his post. He explained that he had already applied to retire in 1794 due to illness and old age but had remained at his post at the request of the government. His worsening health made this impossible. He retired to his plantation where he lived for a further two years. *[ed. Calmeyer says Johannes died in 1796 but this two-year period of retirement indicates that the year of death might have been 1798.]*

Johannes had a son, Abraham, born in Curacao on 8 January 1767. Abraham died in Suriname on 2 February 1838 after many years of colonial service.

Abraham initially devoted himself to agriculture in Curacao but, after a few years, he joined the governing administration and over the course of his service accepted roles of increasing responsibility. By 1800 he became the Receiver General of the colony and a member of the governing Council.

On 23 July 1800 five French ships appeared off Curacao bringing news that the English were planning an attack on the island and they, therefore, had come to support the defenders of Curacao. *[ed. The French and English were at war – the War of the Second Coalition.]* Following length discussions and deliberations, the Governor rejected their offer of assistance. In reply the French revealed their true objective and demanded the surrender of the island. The Council rejected this demand, and the French commander sent his troops ashore. The island defenders set out to repel the French by force, but the invaders had come in strength and the situation grew desperate for the islanders. Then, on 10 September an English frigate appeared off the island. The inhabitants of Curacao now found themselves between two hostile camps. Choosing the lesser of two evils the island was placed under the protection of the English on 11 September 1800, and the French were driven out.

By the peace of Amiens in 1802, Curacao was returned to the Dutch. Abraham de Veer had established a sound reputation during the invasion and in 1803 was appointed to the role of joint Commissioner, responsible for the governance of the island.

Peace brought little relief to the island. It was ravaged by plague and in 1803 the Islanders received news that war had broken out again between France and England and the Dutch were involved. This made it necessary to put the island in a position of defense, but necessary military resources were lacking, there was a shortage of food, and the island was impoverished, its finances completely disorganized. The Commissioners set to work improving the finances, purchasing provisions, setting price controls to avoid food inflation, and restoring fortifications as quickly as possible. The standing army was reinforced by citizen volunteers.

While preparations for defense were underway in 1803 a Captain Robert Tucker appeared in the harbor of Curacao commanding an English war corvette and intending to attack. The island military was able to capture Tucker and his officers and forestall the attack. However, a more serious attempt by the English soon followed. Early in 1804 Captain John Bligh [*ed. A cousin of William Bligh of "Mutiny on the Bounty" fame*] appeared in the harbor with an English squadron and claimed the island. Bligh's troops landed and marched through the island, plundering, and burning as they went. The house of Abraham de Veer suffered great damage. The plantation of his half-brother Jasper was taken over by fifteen English officers. Four attempts were made to drive out the invaders. All failed. De Veer encouraged the military to attack one final time. In this war of attrition, the English finally fell back and vacated the island.

Later in 1804 a new governor arrived and took over the administration of Curacao. De Veer stayed on in various capacities until 1807 when he departed for the Netherlands. Shortly after his arrival he was appointed Governor of the Dutch Gold Coast [*ed. Contemporary Ghana.*]. He accepted this position in the hope that it would be of benefit to his wife and seven younger children, whom he had left behind on Curacao. In 1808, accompanied by his two eldest sons, he sailed for the Gold Coast, carrying with him a large supply of his own merchandise with which to conduct trade at his destination. Misfortune befell him. The ship was overtaken by an English frigate and, after a fierce struggle, captured and brought to Plymouth. De Veer was made a prisoner of war until

1809, first in England, then on his honor in the Netherlands. He lost all his merchandise. In 1809 he was exchanged and instructed to leave for his new appointment as soon as possible.

He complied promptly, again accompanied by his two eldest sons. When he reached his destination, he found the castle at St. George d'Elmina under siege by members of the Fante Confederacy. *[ed. This was a slave castle where captured slaves were held until ships arrived to take them to the western hemisphere. The Fante were a group, native to the region, conducting a constant war of resistance against Dutch colonization.]* After six months the siege ended, and the attackers withdrew.

For the next five years Abraham was cut off from all communication with the rest of the world, while contending with the destructive influence of the climate, the ongoing hostilities with the indigenous people and the lack of financial resources to pay his troops and administrative officials. Eventually he was forced to pay wages from his own pocket rather than surrender the colony. Having no writing paper, he was forced to tear leaves from old books to keep up with his notes.

In 1816 his term was up, his replacement arrived, and he was able to return to the Netherlands. He was entrusted with the administration of the islands of Sint Eustatius, Sint Martin, and Saba. He departed for Curacao where, after a separation of ten years, he was reunited with his wife and younger children. Once settled in his new offices he assembled and submitted his claim for all the expenses he had born while governing the Gold Coast. He had the monies paid to him deposited with his cousin Johannes Abraham Severyn in Amsterdam, but a few days later his cousin's trading house went bankrupt, and de Veer lost the whole amount.

In 1821 Abraham was appointed Governor of Suriname. Here he made particularly valuable contributions by curtailing illegal trade in slaves *[ed. Slavery was not abolished in Suriname until 1863.]*, rebuilding the capital, destroyed by fire earlier in 1821, restoring the finances of the colony, and

taking steps to prevent leprosy and promote vaccinations. However, because of the low exchange rate of Surinamese currency, in which he was paid, he was unable to recover his own finances.

He retired in 1828.

[ed. Succeeding generations were not so colorful.] Abraham had a son, Johannes, born in Curacao and residing in St. Eustatius when he died. Johannes had a son, Johannes, born in St. Eustatius and residing in Aruba when he died. Johannes the younger had a son Gerard who was born in Curacao and died in Aruba. Gerard in turn had a son Eduard who was born in Aruba. *[ed. Eduard was still alive when Calmeyer published his research. One of Eduard's grandsons was the contributor of the Y-DNA used by the Mennonite DNA project to match Benjamin de Fehr (1733 – 1822) to the old Dutch lineage.]*

2.3 Anneke was born in Danzig in 1588. On 5 March 1612 she married Abraham van Amersfoort in Amsterdam. Her husband, born in Danzig on 30 April 1565, was the son of Hans van Amersfoort and Cacilia Fyans.

2.4 Jacob was born in Danzig on 4 March 1594. He married Agneta van Dyck there on 15 November 1615. Agneta was born in Danzig on 2 April 1594 and died there on 18 March 1673. Jacob predeceased his wife.

2.5 Hans. Information about this branch is fragmentary.

2.6 Gysbert – The Danzig Branch. This branch continues to this day in Danzig, in various places in the Netherlands, Germany, Russia and possibly in England. Most of its members still belong to the Mennonite congregation. *[ed. Calmeyer appears to be unaware that descendants also migrated to North America.]*

Gysbert was born in Amsterdam on 7 November 1600, baptized there, then settled in Danzig and died there on 16 February 1646. He married Anna van Buygen in Danzig on 2 February 1625. They had a son, Gysbert, born in Danzig

on 26 January 1626. Anna died not long after the birth of this child. The child died on 23 December 1634.

On 7 May 1628 Gysbert married Maria Philipsdr van Dyck in Danzig. She was the daughter of Philip van Dyck, born in Danzig on 31 July 1606. She died in Danzig on 30 August 1676. *[ed. Gysbert's brother Jacob married Agneta van Dyck, the sister of Maria van Dyck.]* The children from the second marriage were Philipp (3.1), Anna (3.2), Maria (3.3), Jacob (3.4), Cornelius (3.5), Cornelius (3.6), Karel (3.7), Gysbert (3.8), Deborah (3.9) and Agneta (3.10).

Generation 3.

3.1 Philipp was born in Danzig on 1 May 1629, baptized in Amsterdam, and died in Danzig on 26 April 1683. He was a broker, living in Klein Mausdorf, near Danzig, in the "Marienburg Werder".

3.2 Anna was born in Danzig on 14 October 1630, baptized in Amsterdam, and died in Danzig on 11 July 1671. Possibly she was married to Jacob Jansz Bagdag.

3.3 Maria was born in Danzig on 16 February 1632 and died there on 22 January 1690. She never married.

3.4 Jacob was born in Danzig on 19 July 1633, baptized in Amsterdam, and died there on 17 July 1688. He was a gold braid/lace craftsman and not very wealthy.

The gold braid/lace craft was one of the branches of domestic trade which the Dutch had introduced to Danzig. After the local Danzig artisans learned this skill, however, they began a fierce attempt to prohibit the Anabaptists from working in the trade. The guild of Mennonite bullion workers ("Braid Makers" or "Trimmers") managed to resist and preserve their trade.

3.5 Cornelius was born in Danzig on 26 October 1634 and died there on 1 June 1635.

3.6 Cornelius was born in Danzig on 13 April 1636, baptized in Amsterdam on 27 July 1670, and died in Danzig on 27 November 1699. Cornelius was a gold braid/lace craftsman in Neugarten until 1681, then a merchant in Alt-Schottland, both suburbs of Danzig. He married Suzanna Van Beuningen (daughter of Isaac and Suzanna van Eyck) in Danzig on 19 January 1671. She was born in Danzig on 21 July 1650, baptized there on 7 July 1669, and died in Danzig on 7 September 1673. Cornelius next married Magdalena Grauwert (daughter of Cornelius and Christina) in Danzig on 25 December 1675. She was born in Danzig on 7 August 1653, baptized there on 12 July 1672, and died in Alt-Schottland (near Danzig) on 4 December 1685. His third marriage was to Elizabeth Lambert (daughter of Daniel and Elisabeth Reimer). She was born in Danzig on 31 January 1666, baptized there on 23 June 1686, and died in Danzig on 26 April 1737. After the death of Cornelius, she married Gerhard Moor in 1704.

3.7 Karel was born in Danzig on 30 July 1638 and died there on 16 February 1663.

3.8 Gysbert was born in Danzig on 23 February 1640, baptized in Amsterdam, and died in Danzig on 20 August 1693. He married Catherine von Roy in Danzig on 17 November 1669. He lived in the “Marienburg Werder” and was probably the ancestor of a branch that resided there but is now extinct in that region. *[ed. The von Roy family lived in this region.]* Beginning in 1788 some of Gysbert’s descendants participated in the Mennonite emigration from West Prussia to South Russia, brought about by the difficulties the Mennonites encountered in obtaining land in Prussia. These emigrants established a Russian branch, whose descendants were still alive before 1914.

[ed. The father of Catherine was Wilhelm von Roy, and his father was probably Anthonius, based on research conducted and published by Joachim von Roy. He has told me that contrary information indicating her father was either Jan or Richard is incorrect and stems from errors in the Danzig State Archives records.]

Another Gysbert de Veer, whose date and place of birth and parents cannot be determined, was baptized on 17 June 1696 in Danzig, and married there on 3 November 1697 to Sara Momber, the widow of Tobias Stuttman, a brandy distiller. This Gysbert died on 13 August 1711, leaving a son also named Gysbert who was a gold lace maker in Hoppenbruch, near Danzig. The younger Gysbert married Sara Peters *[ed. on 27 November 1720; date found in the Danzig Church Book]* and they had a son Cornelius, who appears in records in 1740, by which time both his parents had died *[ed. Gysbert died on 13 September 1736 and Sara on 2 September 1737; dates found in the Danzig Church Book.]*

[ed. It is not clear why Calmeyer felt it was important to mention this individual or his descendants unless there was some suspicion that he might have been a son of Gysbert (1640 – 1693). While there is no record of the offspring of Gysbert (1640 – 1693) there has been speculation about the lineage leading to Benjamin de Fehr (1733 – 1822) who settled in Russia. See the reference to Herman Thiessen below.]

3.9 Deborah was born in Danzig on 7 August 1642, baptized in Amsterdam, and died in Danzig on 9 January 1683. She married Cornelius Kauenhoven in Danzig. He was baptized in Danzig on 7 June 1671 and died there on 28 March 1687.

3.10 Agneta was born in Danzig on 18 July 1644, baptized in Amsterdam, and died in Danzig on 10 September 1680. She married Peter Van Roy who died in Danzig on 6 December 1698. *[ed. Peter von Roy is a brother of Catherine, wife of Gysbert (1640 – 1693).]*

[ed. This is the end of the genealogical information recorded by Calmeyer related to the Danzig descendants of the de Veer family. I will turn now to the subject of how this genealogy relates to Benjamin de Fehr (1733 – 1822) who settled in Russia at the end of the eighteenth century.]

Benjamin de Fehr (1733 – 1822)

Benjamin de Fehr is the ancestor of the Canadian Mennonite de Veer (Fehr) lineage. His name is found numerous times in old records of the Mennonites who moved to Russia at the end of the eighteenth century. Tracing his descendants to people living in Canada today is not difficult. However, developing the lineage back in time to the de Veer family is a challenge. Concrete information is fragmentary. Calmeyer tells us that the de Veers who migrated to Russia were descendants of Gysbert (1640 – 1693) but there is a gap of two generations between Gysbert and Benjamin about which nothing conclusive is known.

Herman Thiessen, a genealogist who completed a tremendous amount of research, postulated that Benjamin's father was another Benjamin who died in 1743. He had a daughter, Elizabeth, but there are no records of any other children. Benjamin is not a very common name in Mennonite records, and it is possible that the elder Benjamin gave his son the same name and this relationship is true. Thiessen further hypothesized that the father of the elder Benjamin was a Cornelius de Veer, a son of Gysbert (1640 – 1693). I have been unable to find any records to corroborate this, or any records to confirm the existence of this Cornelius.

An alternate line of thinking may focus on the Gysbert (baptized in 1696 and died in 1711) mentioned by Calmeyer. The dates support a hypothesis wherein he was a son of Gysbert (1640 – 1692) and the grandfather of Benjamin. Once again, I have found no records to support this.

Fortunately, the Mennonite DNA project has Y-DNA data from descendants of Benjamin (1733 – 1822) and Y-DNA data from the descendant of Abraham de Veer (2.2 above), the uncle of Gysbert (1640 – 1693), and this information shows that their common ancestor was Gysbert Jansz de Veer (1556 – 1615). The search for Benjamin's parents and grandparents continues.

Sources

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