

The many names of Harmen Janse Knickerbocker

Part 2:

Harmen Janse Knickerbacker Van Wye

Bryan Knickerbocker, January, 2018

This report is part of a series on the many names of Harmen Janse Knickerbocker. Part 1 covered three names:

- Harmen Janse Van Bommel, a name was already well-known to Knickerbocker genealogists, and
- Harmen Janse Van Turkeyen, a name that is probably new to most readers, and
- Harmen Boertie, which was used to describe our ancestor late in life. (Boert = farmer).

This is Part 2. We will discuss the name Harmen Janse Van Wye.

The “Van Wye” name is already well-known to many Knickerbocker genealogists. However, we will offer some new insights.

Background

“Occasional” Use of Van Wye

As everyone knows, our ancestor *occasionally* called himself Harmen Janse Van Wye.

The word “occasionally” goes back to William Van Alstyne’s work in the NYGB&R work (1908/1909.

Country from Holland prior to 1803 and settled in
Occasionally he added the termination Van Wie to
his name indicating that he came from Wie, the present Wyhe, a
few miles south of Zwolle, in the Province of Overijssel, Holland.

Mr. Van Alstyne implied that he knew that Harmen Janse was from the town of Wyhe, in Overijssel. This was an off-handed comment. It was careless, compared to Mr. Van Alstyne’s other work.

A few years later, in 1914, Mr. Van Alstyne wrote a letter to Kathlyne Knickerbacker Viele that showed that he his opinion had matured. (Howard Knickerbocker found the letter and posted it on knic.com)

Mr. Van Alstyne speculated that our ancestor may have lived in either or both of Whye or Bommel.

The
ancestor’s name appears as Van Bommel more often and there was an old family in Holland by
the name of Van Bommel which I have not investigated. Harmen Jansen Knickerbocker may
have lived in either or both Whye or Bommel or his family may have originated there in the
past.

In the same letter from 1914, Mr. Van Alstyne speculated that our ancestor might have been descended from a cake baker (koek bakker).

Unfortunately, though, Mr. Van Alstyne never published an update to his 1908/1909 history, and the contents of the 1914 letter were largely unknown until they were posted on knic.com.

Because Mr. Van Alstyne never updated or corrected his NYGBR work, numerous amateur genealogists have latched onto the claim that our ancestor was born in Whye, Overijssel, Holland.

There is a separate theory that says that our ancestor was from the part of the ancient Van Wye family.

This report will review the evidence related to these “Van Wye” claims.

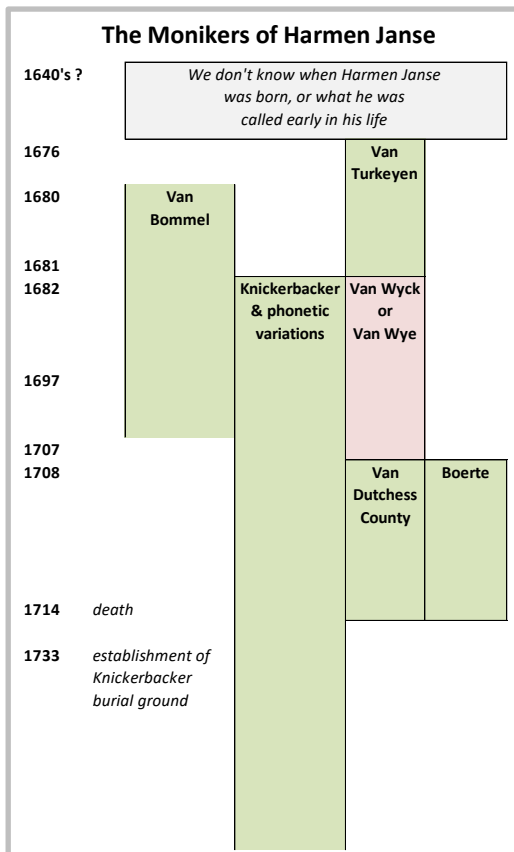
How Often Was “Van Wye” Actually Used?

In her 1916 book, Kathlyne Knickerbacker Viele cited only two documents where he was called Van Wyye or Wyye or Wye:

- 1682 Deed, Harme Jansz Kinnekerbacker and Hermen Jansen Van Wyekyckback(e)
- 1697 Deed, Harmen Jansen Knickerbacker Van Wyye

It has been 100+ years since Ms. Viele reported those two instances. It has been about 20 years since the start of the Internet age. In all of that time, nobody has ever found any lost cache of records for Harmen Janse “Van Wyye.”

Instead of saying Harmen Janse’ use of the name was occasional, we should say it was “very rare.”



Shown here is a timeline that was first used in Part 1. This illustrates the various monikers used by Harmen Janse.

There are many historic records where our ancestor was called Van Bommel. His repeated use of “Van Bommel” proves that this had some important, long-term meaning to Harmen Janse. For example, Harmen used “Van Bommel” for the baptism of his son Lawrence.

Starting in 1682, our ancestor was called by variations of “Knickerbacker.” This became his surname. (Prior to that, like many Dutch immigrants, he didn’t use a surname.)

Our ancestor was also called Van Turkeyen and Van Dutchess County, but these seem like transient monikers.

“Van Wye” was another transient moniker. It was very rare, and apparently only when our ancestor was living on the northern edge of the settlement of Halve Maen.

The Van Wye story will become clear in the later discussion.

The Difficulty in Reading Old Documents

In the next few sections, we will debate the meanings of some very old documents.

There are situations where a single letter can totally change the meaning of a word. For example, WYE might be a reference to an ancient Dutch family, but WYC might be a reference to a local place. (WYCK means district, for example in Rensselaer's Wyck.)

There are times when it is almost impossible to read individual letters.

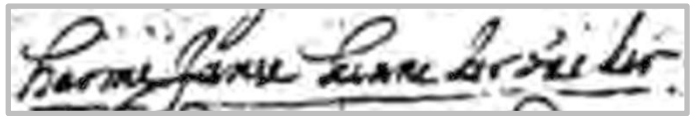


Here are three letters, extracted from our ancestor's deed from 1682. Thanks to modern technology, we can blow them up to large size, and look at them in detail.

We'll give you a hint: two of these letters that are the lower case version of E. One of these letters is a lower case C.

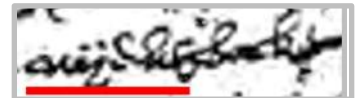
There is no way to tell these four letters apart, when you look at them in isolation.

Here is our ancestor's name, from a 1682 deed. The three letters shown above are: (1) the "e" from Janse; (2) the "e" from Harme; and (3) the "c" from backer.



For some perspective: the above example involves clear handwriting. There are far more difficult examples found in many old records.

Interpreting the original documents is hard work. For example, consider the scribbled handwriting shown here. The last six letters of this scribble appear to be BACKER. However, the first part of the scribble, underlined in red, is almost impossible to read.



As we will discuss later, this scribble is a key part of the Van Wye story.

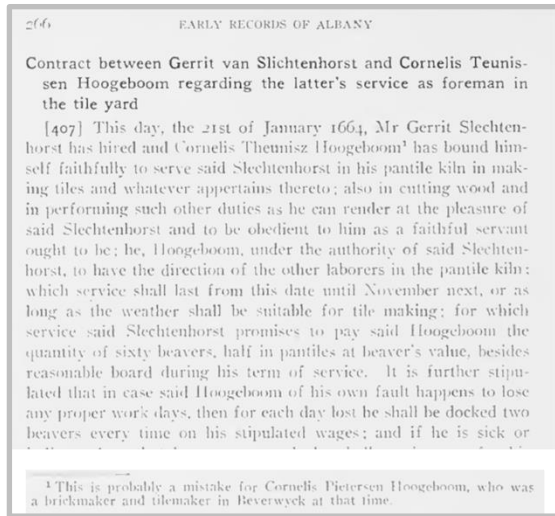
The above scribble is from the original version of a deed from 1682. We will also discuss two other deeds, from 1697 and 1707. For these later deeds, we do not have the original documents. This means that somebody else had already done the transcription. We have no idea how good the original handwriting was, or how many times the person doing the transcription had to interpret between similar letters such as "e" or "c."

Beavers

The colonists in the remote settlements on the Hudson used beaver skins as their unit of currency.

As we will see later, Harmen Janse's first known land purchase was in December of 1682. The purchase involved a mortgage. He agreed to pay a total of 30 beaver skins, with the last payment due in January 1686.

It is hard for us to understand the value of 30 beaver skins.



For perspective on the value of the currency, consider this employment contract for Cornelis Hooegeboom.

Cornelis was hired to be the foreman of a tile plant.

The contract ran from January through November. Cornelis' salary was 60 beaver skins, plus "reasonable board."

We conclude from this that a worker in a middle management position, such as the foreman at a kiln, could earn 60 or more beaver pelts in a year. (We say "or more" because Cornelis was also receiving "board.")

Additional perspective on the value of a beaver can be seen in the appraisal of the clothing of Gerrit Brants. This was a wealthy woman, so the clothing was probably of a high quality.

Her scarlet petticoat was valued at 8 beavers.

The clothing listed here was worth a total of 61 beavers.

| Appraisal of the clothing of the late Gerrit Brants | |
|---|------------|
| We, the undersigned, Elsie Jan's daughter, wife of Jan van Aecken, and Neeltje Jan's daughter, wife of Stoffel Jansz, hereby certify that to the best of our knowledge, as impartial persons called for this purpose, we have valued and appraised the following linen and woolen clothes of the late Gerrit Brants, deceased wife of Mr Goossen Gerritsz van Schaack | |
| An armozine skirt with green lining, valued at..... | 7 beavers |
| A black silk skirt, valued at..... | 6 " |
| A scarlet petticoat, at..... | 8 " |
| Another scarlet petticoat, at..... | 8 " |
| An apron, a cloak, a bodice, two short cloaks, and two pairs of sleeves, valued together at..... | 6 " |
| [414] Four round handkerchiefs, at..... | 4 " |
| Six handkerchiefs, at one beaver..... | 6 " |
| A parcel of miscellaneous clothes, at..... | 5 " |
| Eight chemises, at..... | 4 " |
| Ten aprons, at..... | 4 " |
| Eleven night neckerchiefs, at..... | 3 " |
| Amounting together to sixty-one beavers..... | 61 beavers |

Thus, Harmen Janse was paying a very modest price for his land. He agreed to pay a total price of 30 beavers, with the payments spread over several years. The total price represented about a half-year's wages for a middle management worker like Cornelis Hooegeboom. The price would have been a pittance to a wealthy woman like Gerrit Brants Van Schaick.

Bakers

As we've already shown, our ancestor's name appeared to include the letters "BACKER." This was a common mis-spelling of the Dutch word "bakker" which means "baker."

Today, we automatically think that "baker" is a reference to food. There were many colonists who were involved in baking food, especially bread. Bread was apparently a part of every Dutchman's diet. The price and quality of bread were regulated within the colonies.

The word BAKKER had additional uses that did not involve food. A man who made bricks was a steen bakker (stone baker). A man who made tile was a pannen bakker; the tiles were probably for roofing. There were several kilns in the Dutch colonies, and therefore there were multiple people whose profession was "baker."

Recall from part 1 of this series that Harmen Janse and Andries Hansen were involved in a lawsuit with a neighbor, Mees Hoogetboom. Andries was described in multiple documents as a "baker" and Mees Hoogetboom's brother was involved with making tile.

Marbles

We will also say a couple of words about marbles. The corresponding Dutch word is knickers.

In Dutch, KNICKER BAKKER would mean marble baker. By the 1800's, amateur genealogists speculated that our ancestor might have been a "marble baker." However, there is absolutely no evidence to support that idea.

There are a few mentions in the Dutch records of a game of "nickers." This was one of the activities that was banned on Sundays during church service. It presumably was a marble game. So far, however, there aren't any historical records that suggest that the colonists made their own marbles.

In the colonies, there were stone bakers and tile bakers. There was even a sugarbaker (Hendrick Arentse de suykerbaker). However, there is no record that refers to marble bakers.

Calebacker (or Kallebacker)

There are Dutch records that use the terms Calenbacker, Calebacker, and Kallebacker. These were used to describe an island, and also an individual Native American. Nobody knows the origin of "Calebacker." There was some speculation that "backer" referred to bareback riding, but this theory must have been invented by an English speaker; it makes no sense in Dutch. There was other speculation that this referred to a clay baker (klai bakker). This makes more sense.

It is possible that the term Calebacker was actually adopted from a Native American phrase.

Later in this report we will discuss how our name was originally written: Kinne ker backer. We need to keep open the possibility that our name might have had roots in a Native American phrase.

Anthony Van Schaick

Our ancestor crossed paths with Anthony Van Schaick several times.

Anthony was the son of Goosen Gerritse Van Schaick and his first wife, Gerritie Brants. Gerritie died shortly after Anthony was born. (The inventory of her clothing was shown earlier.)

The “Half Moon” patent was granted to Goosen Gerritsen Van Schaick and Philip Pieterse Schuyler in 1665. The original patent included several islands, plus the present town of Waterford.



Quitance of the children of Goosen Gerritsen van Schaick by his first wife Geertje Brants for their portions of their father's estate

Hand of Geertje van Schayk, widow of the late Goose Gerritse van Shayk, for their patrimonial or father's estate, having in consideration of said paternal inheritance received payment for the farm sold to Anth^o. van Shayk aforesaid, which was sold for five hundred and fifty beavers, of which the widow aforesaid takes one hundred beavers, the three children by the first wife aforesaid having

Anthony Van Schaick was a wealthy man.

For example, in March of 1681 he bought his father's farm from his step-mother and siblings for 550 beavers. (Anthony was about 26 years old at the time.) Later, Anthony Van Schaick built a mansion on what is now called Van Schaick island.

Harmen Janse once leased a farm next door to the Van Schaick family. In 1676, he complained about the grazing habits of the cattle owned by Annetie Lievens, the second wife of Goosen Gerritsen Van Schaick. Andries Hanse was witness.

Ordinary session held in Albany, August 15, 1676

Harme Janse, farmer, appearing in court, complains that he is still suffering great loss and damage to his grain by the cattle of Annetie Lievens, the widow of Goose Gerritse, deceased, which he proves by Andries Hanse. He also presents a petition praying that he may take the cattle of the aforesaid widow to Albany to the sheriff in case he again finds them in his grain.

Anthony Van Schaick is mentioned again later in this report.

Robert Livingston

Our ancestor crossed paths with a man named Robert Livingston.

Mr. Livingston's native language was English, but he was multi-lingual. He served for a time as the secretary of the Albany colonies. Mr. Livingston once worked for Nicholas Van Rensselaer, and eventually married Nicholas' widow.

Mr. Livingston later received a land grant for Livingston's Manor, on the eastern side of the Hudson. Livingston Manor, the predecessor of Columbia County, was the northern border of the Dutchess County property that was later purchased by Harmen Janse.



We will mention Mr. Livingston several more times in this report.

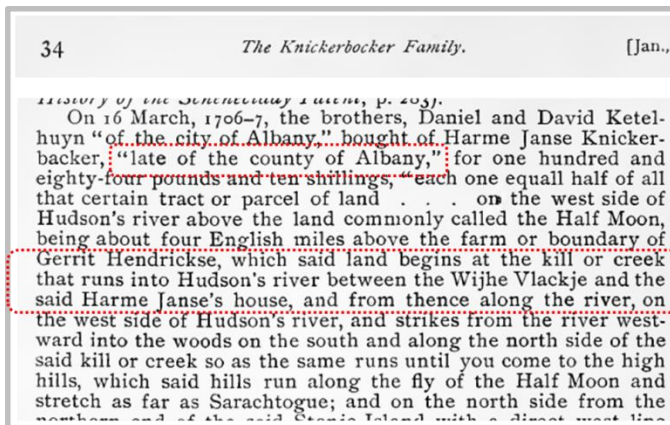
We will now discuss three important deeds, in reverse chronological order.

1707 Deed for Harmen Janse

We will begin our discussion in 1707. This is when Harmen Janse sold his property west of the Hudson. He moved south, to Dutchess County.

Unfortunately, we do not have a copy of the original deed. The only thing we have is an excerpt of the deed, as quoted by William Van Alstyne.

This deed involved people who spoke Dutch, but the deed itself might have been written in English. (The transition to English, as the official language, appeared to happen gradually, starting in the 1680's.)



In this deed Harmen Janse Knickerbacker was described according to where he used to live: He was "late of Albany County."

As we have mentioned, Harmen Janse's use of Van Wyye / Wyee / Wye was short-lived. This deed is an example. On the day that he sold his Halve Maen property, he had already stopped calling himself "Van Wyye."

The description of the property, four miles from Gerrit Hendrickse, is similar to the deed from 1697 which we discuss later.

Within the second red box is a reference to a place called the Wijhe Vlackje. This description obviously has Dutch roots.

VLAJJE (pronounced something like vlak-ye) would refer to a flat plain, such as along a river. WIJHE must have been the name of this plain. The pronunciation of WIJHE would be something along the lines of WY-ye.

Thus, in 1708, Harmen Janse Knickerbocker moved away from an area called something like the WYye Flats.

Later in this report, we will see the words WYEE, WYE, and WYYE. As English speakers, we might assume that these words rhyme with "sky." However, we must consider the possibility that all of these were pronounced WY-ye.

1697 Deed for Harmen Janse Kinneckerbacker Van Wyee

We now turn to the deed with the most occurrences of WYEE / WYE / WYEE.

We only have a copy of this deed, in English. This deed might have been originally written in Dutch. Nobody has ever found the original version of the deed.

This property was remote. The deed uses a neighboring farm as a landmark. Guert Hendricks was four English miles to the south. (Four miles was a long distance by the standards of 1697.) Other records suggest that Guert Hendricks, at that point in time, had a farm along the Mudder Kill creek, at the northern boundary of Waterford. Harmen Jansen was four miles north, and thus was somewhere near today's Lighthouse Park (GPS 42.838, -73.672) in the the town of Half Moon.

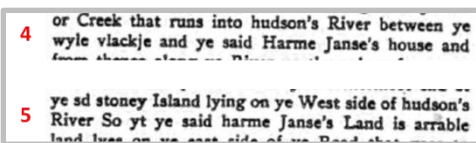
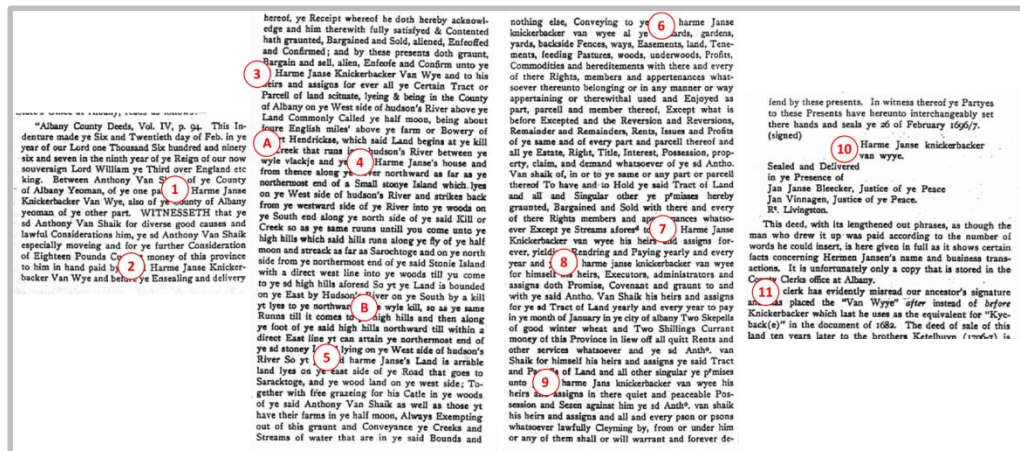
of Albany on ye West side of hudson's River above ye Land Commonly Called ye half moon, being about foure English miles' above ye farm or Bowery of Geurt Hendrickse, which said Land begins at ye kill or Creek that runs into hudson's River between ye

Shown below is the full English language version of the deed, along with some of Kathlyne Viele's comments. We have squeezed this down into a single image, and marked the key passages.

There are two sets of markings here.

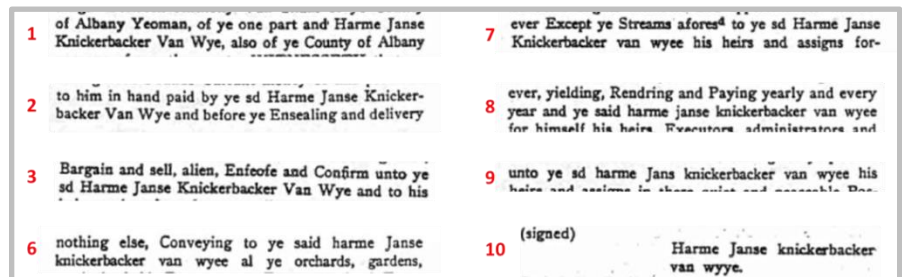
One set of markings is numeric, running from one to ten.

The other set of markings uses the letter A and B.



Harmen Janse Knickerbacker Van Wyee / Wye / Wyee is mentioned eight times.

Our ancestor is referred to as Harmen Janse twice, at the positions we labelled as 4 and 5



The spelling of WYEE varied. The first three times it was WYE The next four times it was WYEE with an extra E. The last time, on the signature line, it ends in YE, as WYEE.

In her book, Ms. Viele chose to focus on the signature line, and said this:

11 The clerk has evidently misread our ancestor's signature and has placed the "Van Wyye" after instead of before Knickerbacker v

Ms. Viele's comment about "the clerk" is misleading. The deed was written first, before it was signed. She is actually claiming that "the clerk" misrepresented our ancestor eight times, even before the deed was signed.

Also, her vague reference to "the clerk" ignores the fact that Robert Livingston was listed on the deed, and was the secretary of Albany County. Anthony Van Schaick was also in the room. Mr. Livingston and Mr. Schaick knew far more about our ancestor than we do.

Ms. Viele seemed to desperately want our ancestor to be named Harmen Janse Van Wye. Ms. Viele never mentioned the possibility that WYEE / WYE / WYVE could be the name of an area within the Halve Maen colony.

Before venturing off into exotic explanations for Van Wyye, we should look closely at the deed.

At the position marked "A", the deed refers to "ye kill or creek that runs into Hudson's River between ye **WYLE VLACKJE** and ye Harmen Janse's house." (Emphasis added.)

A which said Land begins at ye kill or Creek that runs into hudson's River between ye wyle vlackje and ye said Harme Janse's house and from thence along ye River northward as far as ve

What did they mean by the words wyle vlackje? The problem is the first word, WYLE. It's not a legitimate Dutch word, and there are no historic records referring specifically to an area called WYLE VLACKTE.

B on ye East by Hudson's River on ye South by a kill yt lyes to ye northward of ye wyle kill, so as ye same Runns till it comes to ye high hills and then along ye foot of ye said high hills northward till within a

At the position marked "B" the deed reads "bounded on ye east by Hudson's River on ye south by a kill yt lyes to ye northward of ye **WYLE KILL** so as ye same runns til it comes to ye high hills." (Emphasis added.)

Again, the same word: WYLE.

We know from the mentions of the Guert Hendricks farm, four miles away, that the 1697 property was the same as the 1707 property. From the 1707 deed, we know that the property was adjacent to the "Wijhe Vlackje."

Thus, we suspect that the original handwritten deed in 1697 said WIJE with a J instead of than WILE with an L. WIJE would be pronounced something like "WY-ye" and would match the 1707 deed. Thus, our ancestor was from WYye.

Our ancestor was Harman Jansen Knickerbacker, from Wyye. This is exactly how his signature was recorded ... Harmen Jansen Knickerbacker Van Wyye.

How were Deeds Handled for People Without Surnames?

We are about to discuss a Knickerbocker deed from 1682. First, though, we want to illustrate the problems caused by the lack of surnames among the Dutch colonists.

The book cited below contains hundreds of deeds from the Dutch colonies near Albany. Many deeds refer to upper-class people, who often used their surnames. For example, there are several deeds involving the Van Schaick family.

Things were different when the buyer and seller were from the working class. The “clerk” who wrote the deeds was Robert Livingston, a very rich man. As part of his job, Mr. Livingston had to find ways to identify working-class people who didn’t have a surname. The following deed is a great example.

**Deed from Teunis Teunissen de Metselaer to
Paulus Martensen Raemaecker
for a house and lot in Albany**

Appeared before me, Robert Livingston, secretary of Albany, colony of Renselaerswyck and Schaenhechtady, etc., in presence of the Honorable Mr. Dirk Wessels and Mr. Corn van Dyk, magistrates of said jurisdiction, Teunis Teunisse de Metselaer who declared that he had granted, conveyed and made over in true, rightful and free ownership to and for the behoof Paulus Martense Raemmaecker a certain house and lot standing and lying here in Albany, with all that is therein fast by earth and nail, adjoining to the south the house of Harme Janse** and to the north Geurt Heyndrix to the east the public street and to the west the wagon road; in breadth, front and rear, four rods, and in length from the street to the wagon road

** Harme Janse Lyndrayer

In this deed, the seller was Teunis Tunisson (son of Teunis.) Tuenis shows up in dozens of records from Rensselaerswyck. He never used a surname. Robert Livingston chose to describe this person as Teunis de Metselaer (Tuenis the Mason).

The buyer was Paulus, the son of Marten. Mr. Livingston described this man as something like Raemaker. RAAM is a window, while RAED is a wheel. In other documents involving Paulus, he was Raedmaker. Mr. Livingston was describing Paulus Wheelmaker.

In the deed, Mr. Livingston noted that the adjoining house was owned by Harmen Janse. Jonathon Pearson’s footnote says this was Harme Janse Lyndrayer. Once again, this was describing a profession. LYND RAYER means line turner; this was Harmen Janse Ropemaker.

Court records from the colonies used the same approach. People without surnames were described either using their profession (Harme Janse Lyndrayer), or the area where they lived (Harmen Jansen Van Turkeyen).

This approach was reasonable, because the population of the colonies was very small. The first census of Albany County, in 1697, showed only about 320 total households in all of Albany County. A first name (Paulus), a father’s name (Martenson), and a profession (wheelmaker) were sufficient to clarify the identity of a person who owned property or had a minor claim in court.

1682 Deed for Kinneckerbacker and Van Wykycbacke

We will now discuss the first deed that has ever been found for our ancestor.

Ms. Viele's book shows the deed in the original Dutch. There are two English language translations of this deed that are readily available. One translation is from Ms. Viele. The other is from Jonathon Pearson, the author of the Annals of Albany series. The two translations are reasonably consistent with each other. Here, we will show key portions of the deed in Dutch, and the English language translations.

Let's imagine the sequence of events that occurred on December 11, 1682, when the deed was written.

At a scheduled time, Anthony Van Schaick and Harmen Janse walked into Mr. Livingston's office. Mr. Livingston asked a couple of questions. Anthony Van Schaick probably did a lot of the talking; Mr. Schaick and Mr. Livingston knew each other, and had participated in other land transactions. Then, Mr. Livingston wrote out the deed.

The deed has about 300 words. The deed probably took 20 minutes to write, including the time for questions and clarifications.

During those 20 minutes, Mr. Livingston wrote our ancestor's name, harmen janse, three times.

Each time, Mr. Livingston described our ancestor using variations of kenne ker backer. The "kenne ker" is a little hard to read, but the word BACKER is absolutely clear in all three instances.

(Anthony Van Schaick is mentioned multiple times in the deed. Mr. Van Schaick's name does not include any extra description. This is consistent with Robert Livingston's treatment of people with surnames vs. people who didn't have surnames.)

At the end of the 20 minutes, our ancestor scribbled his signature.

Deed from 1682



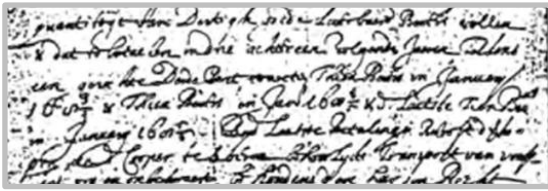
kenne der backer

kenn
niker Backer

kinnd ker
Backer

signature

The deed begins with “appeared before me, Robert Livingston.”



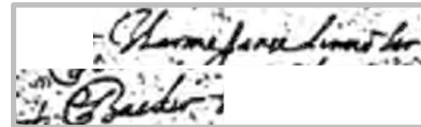
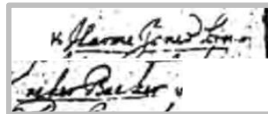
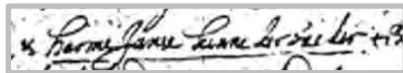
This was a no-money-down mortgage where the first payment was due after 13 months. This suggests (but does not prove) that our ancestor was from the working class, and did not have any cash on hand for a down payment.

quantity of thirty good deliverable beavers and to pay this in three successive years, each year a lawful third part viz. ten beavers in January 1683/4 and ten beavers in the year 1684/5 and the last ten beavers in January 1685/6. With the last payment the seller promises to deliver to the purchaser proper transport of the aforesaid land free and unincumbered save the Lord's Right.

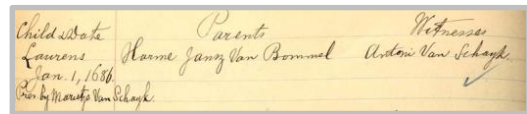
(The colonists were switching away from the “old style” calendar, where March was the start of the year. “January 1683/4” meant the January that occurred during the winter of 1683/1684. Thus, the deed above was dated December, 1682, but the first payment was not due until January, 1684.)

The total price of the property was 30 beaver skins. As shown earlier, this was a very modest price.

The 1682 deed mentions our ancestor four times. We will show all four, in the original Dutch. The first three times that our ancestor was mentioned, he was described as Harmen Janse, followed by words that are something like “kinne ker backer.”



It is interesting that the descriptions of our ancestor do not include the word “Bommel.” Our ancestor had already used Van Bommel in at least two instances, in 1680 and 1681. He would continue to use Van Bommel on important occasions, for example, in the 1686 baptism of son Lawrence. That baptism was witnessed by Anthony Van Schaick.



Why wasn't “Bommel” mentioned in this deed? This is a mystery that we will probably never solve. Before writing the deed, Robert Livingston must have asked our ancestor some questions. Somehow our ancestor's answers led to the descriptions above: Harmen Janse “kinne ker backer.”

Mr. Livingston apparently created our last name. His words must have been based on what he was told by our ancestor during the first few minutes of writing the deed.

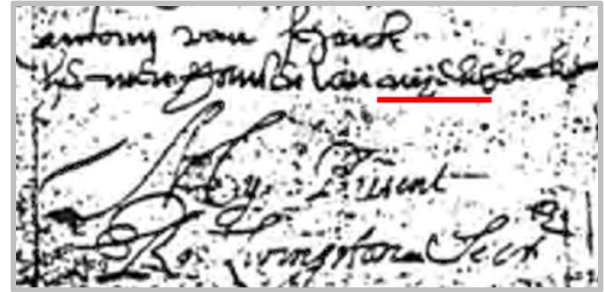
Ordinary session held in Albany, May 6, 1684
 Harmen Janse kinneker Backer, plaintiff, against Mews Hooigeboom, defendant.
 The plaintiff demands of the defendant 8 schepels of wheat on account of a hay-barrack auger.
 The defendant acknowledges the debt.
 The honorable court condemn the defendant to pay the plaintiff the said sum of 8 schepels of wheat according his confession, *cum expensis*.
 Mews Hooigeboom, plaintiff, against Harmen Janse kinnekerbacker, defendant.
 The plaintiff says that 5 years ago he boarded a cow with the defendant, which the defendant in the spring drove out, without notifying the plaintiff, and which thus perished.

Consider these 1684 court records.

In court, our ancestor was now being described as “kinneker Backer.” He had never been described that way in prior court records.

This court description of our ancestor is consistent with the description that had been written by Mr. Livingston, 17 months earlier.

Shown here is the fourth time our ancestor is mentioned in this deed. We are showing a large image, because this image is important to the story.



The first line is the name Anthony Van Schaick. The last line is the name Robt Livingston.

The second line begins with LS, meaning Locus Sigilli, the place of the seal. Then comes a scribble that is hard to read.

Ms. Viele's interpretation of the scribble was Harmen Jansen Van Wyekycback(e). Jonathon Pearson's interpretation was Wyekycbacker.

In the large image above, we underlined the portion of the scribble that supposedly says Wyekycck.

Ms. Viele devoted several paragraphs to discussing this deed. We will show some of her statements, and offer an alternate point of view.

we must bear in mind that he does not call himself Knickerbacker, but "van Wyekycback(e).

Ms. Viele noted that our ancestor "does not call himself Knickerbacker" in his signature.

The family tradition says that Hermen Jansen was in the Dutch navy, and although this has not been proven there is nothing to prevent its having been true. He is said to have been with De Ruyter's fleet in the Battle of Solebay, fought June 7, 1672, and to have been there wounded. I doubt if an unwritten tradition would have done more than have handed down the facts of his fighting and of his wound. Therefore when I found that in the next year (1673) there had been a still more fierce and sanguinary battle fought by the same fleet under the same commanders off the Dutch dunes at a place called Kijk, I could not but note its similarity to the "Kyc" in the ancestor's name, especially when "back" (cheek) gave such an easy reading as—Hermen Jansen van Wye-Kijk-back—Kijk cheek—or cheek marked at Kijk!

Ms. Viele claims the scribble after VAN is our ancestor's actual name.

She explained that the scribble after VAN could be a reference to a Dutch sea battle, and a scar on our ancestor's cheek.

(No such scar was ever mentioned in any record.)

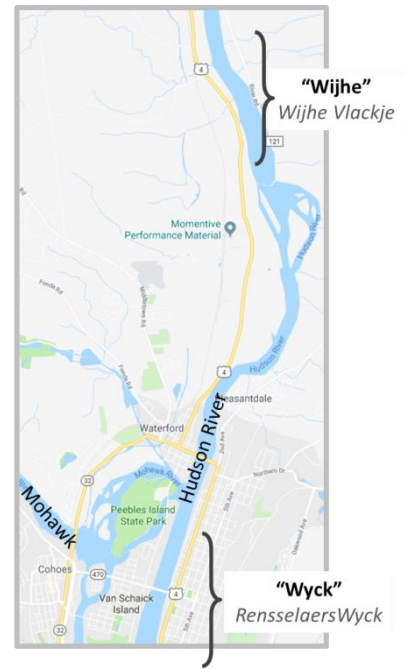
Ms. Viele insisted that the signature was the source of Knickerbocker. This was wrong. The signature happened about 20 minutes too late. "Kinnekerbacker" had already been written three times, in various forms. In reality, our ancestor and Anthony Van Schaick were with Robert Livingston for 20 minutes or more. Within the first few minutes, one of them said something to Mr. Livingston that caused Mr. Livingston to describe our ancestor as kinne ker backer.

It is from this signature that the origin of the name and of the man must be traced.

Everyone seems to think the scribbled signature refers to VAN WYE. This might be true. The scribble from 1682 might be part of the story already covered from 1697 and 1708: It might refer to the Wijhe Vlachte.

However, it is also possible that the first four letters of the scribble are WYCK. VAN WYCK would mean “of the district.” We know Harmen lived in Rensselaer’s Wyck until at least July, 1682. Thus, VAN WYCK might refer to his residence at the time that he signed the deed.

In any case, Harmen Janse was surrounded by places that could explain him being from WYEE or WYVE or WYCK.

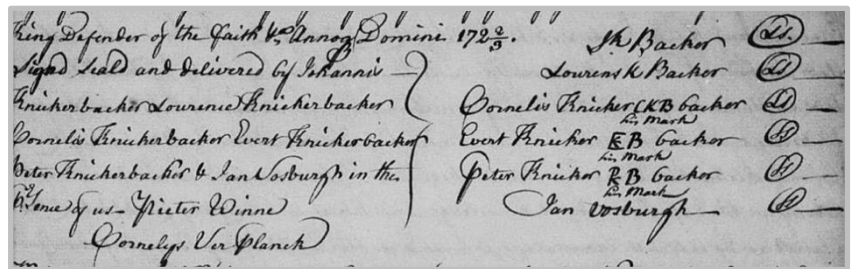


Regardless of whether the scribble is WYE or WYCK, the last part of the scribbled signature contains BACKE (according to Ms. Viele) or BACKER (according to Jonathon Pearson).

The word BACKER is a key connection between the signature and the earlier descriptions.



BACKER continued to appear in documents related to our ancestor. For example, in 1723, the children of Harmen Janse sold some of the land that they had inherited. The signature page of the deed is interesting. Johannes and Lawrence apparently signed the deed, using K Backer as their last name. Cornelius, Evert, and Peter wrote their marks. Cornelius’ mark was CKB. Evert’s mark was a hieroglyph that looks like a combined E and K followed by a B. Peter’s mark combined a P and K, followed by a B.



Thus, all of Harmen Janse’s sons were treating their last name as if it contained “Backer” as a standalone word.

(Once again, we must be cautious about second hand information. The above transaction occurred in 1723, but the deed wasn’t officially recorded in county records until many years later. Thus, the above marks and signatures are not the originals, but instead were apparently replicated by a court clerk, many years later. In this case, though, it seems clear that Backer was a key component of all of the son’s names.)

As noted in Ms. Viele's book, there were at least three other instances where Harmen Janse's oldest son, Johannes, signed his name as J.K. Backer. For example, Johannes signed "J.K. Backer" on some legal papers on the same day in 1707 when Harmen Janse sold his property. Johannes also signed his own family bible as J.K. Backer.

The shortening of KNICKERBACKER to K BACKER might have been out of convenience, for people who were perhaps only marginally literate. However, the word BACKER cannot be ignored.

If BACKER had Dutch origins, it almost certainly meant "baker." (The proper spelling should be BAKKER, with the Dutch double K, but the CK pair was common in the colonies, which tended to merge English and Dutch influences.)

Our real challenge is to connect the scribbled signature and Robert Livingston's descriptions in a way that recognizes the use of BACKER.

The scribbled signature from 1682 might refer to the baker from the district (Harmen Janse Van Wyck ye Bakker).

Thus, the earlier descriptions that were written by Robert Livingston might say something like Kenne ker Backer, which might mean "known as the baker." (In Dutch, KEN and KENNEN means "know.")

This "baker" theory is the only one that we know of that connects "kinnekerbacker" with the scribbled signature.

It is possible that "Backer" had some other meaning. For example, perhaps our ancestor had strong interactions with the nearby Mohawk nation. As already mentioned, there is a long-standing mystery around the meaning of Callebacker or Kallenbacker, which was used to describe both an island, and a Native American. Perhaps our ancestor had acquired a unique moniker that had origins in the Mohawk language.

Summary of the issues around Van Wye

We have briefly mentioned the theory that our ancestor was from an ancient family called Van Wye.

We have discussed Kathlyne Viele's claim about the Van Wye family. Her claim depended strongly on her criticism of "the clerk" who recorded the 1697 deed. The reality is that VAN WYEE / WYE / WYEE was shown after Knickerbacker, eight times. It's hard to believe that this was a mistake. The deed was witnessed by Robert Livingston. Furthermore, Anthony Van Schaick was also in the room. Mr. Van Schaick knew far more about our ancestor than we do. This strongly refutes the Ms. Viele's claims that a "clerk" made a mistake in reading our ancestor's signature, and that our ancestor's name was really Harmen Janse Van Wye.

We have pointed out that Harmen Janse's use of VAN WYEE (or WYEE, or WYE, or WYCK) was very rare. This is a huge red flag for anyone claiming that our ancestor was a proud member of an ancient Dutch family.

We also shown that a place called the Wijhe Vlackje was mentioned in the 1707 deed. Wijhe would be pronounced something like WY-ye.

We have shown that the words WYLE VLACKJE and WYLE KILL are found in the transcribed copy of the 1697 deed. The 1697 deed and the 1707 deed referred to the same property. We therefore suspect that the "L" in WYLE was really a "J." Harme Janse was living near the Wyje Flats. WYJE would be pronounced WY-ye.

We also pointed out that within the key 1697 deed, the spelling WYE occurred only three times. WYE is the spelling that is often quoted by amateur genealogists, but it was outnumbered by the four occurrences of WYEE. The signature was WYEE. The pronunciation was probably WY-ye.

And so: Early in his life, our ancestor was called Harmen Janse Van Turkeyen, a man who lived in Turkeyen. Late in life he was called Harmen Janse Knickerbacker Van Dutchess County, a man who lived in Dutchess County. In his middle age, he was called Harmen Janse Van Wyje, a man who lived in an area on the far north edge of Halve Maen near the WYye Flats.

This appears to be the reason that our ancestor's use of Van Wyee / Wye / Wyje was so rare, and why he never used any variation of "Van Wyee" in church records. The words "Van Wyee" didn't have any deep inner meaning. They only described his current location.

We are still trying to determine the exact location of the WYye Flats (the Wyje Vlachte). This must have been close to the current location of Lighthouse Park along the Hudson River, within the boundaries of the current town of Half Moon.

In any case, there is nothing in any of these records that suggests that our ancestor was a member of the ancient Van Wye family, or that he was from Overijssel.

Sources of Information

- Page 1: *Van Alstyne "occasional" quote from NYGBR, January, 1908*
Van Alstyne letter to Kathlyne Viele was found by Howard Knickerbocker at knic.com
- Page 3: *1682 deed excerpts from KKV*
- Page 5: *Cornelius Hoogeboom contract from ERCCA Volume 3*
Gerrit Brants clothing inventory from ERCCA Volume 3
- Page 6: *Map from Google*
Van Schaick deed from ERCCA Volume 2
August 1676 court record from MCARS Volume 2
Robert Livingston portrait from Wikipedia
- Page 7: *1707 deed excerpt from NYGBR, January, 1908*
- Page 8: *1697 deed Excerpts are from KKV*
- Page 9: *1697 deed Excerpts are from KKV*
- Page 10: *"Metselaer" deed excerpt from ERCCA Volume 2*
- Page 11: *1682 deed from KKV*
- Page 12: *1682 deed excerpts from KKV*
Dutch church record from Ancestry
1684 court record from MCARS Volume 3
- Page 13: *1682 deed excerpts from KKV*
- Page 14: *Map from Google*
1682 deed excerpts from KKV
1723 "K Backer" deed from New York land records, FS, Dutchess County L5, p 238

- ERCCA** = *Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck by Jonathon Pearson, revised and edited by A.J.F. Van Lear.*
Volume 2 (1916)
Volume 3 (1918)
- FS** = *Familysearch.org*
- KKV** = *Sketches of Allied Families: Knickerbacker–Viele by Kathlyne Knickerbacker Viele (1916)*
- MCARS** = *Minutes of the Court of Albany, Rensselaerswyck and Schenectady translated and edited by A.J.F. Van Lear.*
Volume 2 (1928)
Volume 3 (1932)
- NYGBR** = *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*