



NYSFHC Session Syllabus

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DUTCH NAMING SYSTEMS IN EARLY AMERICA

Aaron Goodwin

<https://aarongoodwin.nyc>

TYPES OF NAMES

I. The Patronymic

A patronymic is a name that identifies and uses the subject's father's given name, the primary naming system among the Dutch in early America. The suffixes for patronymics can take a number of closely related forms:

- *-szen, -sen, -se, or -z* (masculine endings)
- *-se, -sd, -sdr, -sen,* or the full suffix *sdochter* (feminine endings)

II. Surname Derived from Place/Origin

The place-origin surname, usually prefixed with *van* (or *from*) but sometimes with *de* (or *the*), was also a popular way for the early Dutch-American to identify himself and to establish a surname. Those places of origin could be of several types:

- nationality
- town or village
- small local district
- named farm-estate for which the subject is owner, leaseholder, or tenant
- named farm-estate for which the subject is a hired farmhand, unrelated to the family in the main dwelling
- named field
- named small farm occupied by a peasant (or *boer*), often a subdivision of a named farm-estate
- named house with a sign
- local habitat

III. Surnames Derived from Occupations

Dutch-American surnames derived from this category are sometimes used intermittently with patronymics and developing surnames:

- *Bleecker* (bleacher of cloth)
- *Schenck* (filler, butler, cupbearer)
- *Koylert/Cuyler* (archer)
- *Blauvelt* (blue field, referring to a flax farmer)
- *Clark* (clerk)

IV. Surnames Derived from Personal Characteristics

While this type of surname is particularly common among the English, it is less so for the Dutch.

- *Vroom/Vroman* (pious or wise man)
- *Krom* (bent, crooked, crippled)
- *Stille* (silent)

- *Krankheyt/Cronkhite* (sickness, invalid)
- *de Groot* (the big man)
- *de Lange* (the tall man)
- *de Witt* (the white man)
- *de Wint* (wind, braggart, blowhard)

NAMING PATTERNS

V. The Order of Names

When two or more of the name components covered above are used together, they usually follow a particular order:

- 1) social status, title
- 2) the first name
- 3) the patronymic
- 4) the surname
- 5) place of origin or residence
- 6) any term used to indicate occupation

VI. Last Names of Married Women

Under the Dutch naming system, women did not change their name at marriage. A woman's name was determined in much the same way a man's name was. If her family had a surname or the name of their place of origin, she may use that, but patronymics were most common, which could refer to a woman's stepfather as well as her father.

In the earliest Dutch period, however, a woman sometimes used her husband's first name as her last, particularly when her father was not known in America. Though it was not broadly the custom in America, some Dutch immigrants used their mother's name, especially if she had an established surname while the father did not. Only after English influence began to overcome Dutch naming customs, well into the 18th century, did women begin taking their husband's surnames.

VII. Godparents or Sponsors

Records of the Dutch Reformed churches in America are critical research tools in Dutch-American research. The Dutch practice of having close relatives serve as godparents means that these records can reveal a more extended family.

Although not absolute, the Dutch had a tendency to have godparents chosen alternately from each side of the family for each successive child's baptism. Once this pattern is established in a given family, any disruption to the pattern serves as a clue to a possible missing child in that family group.

VIII. First Names of Children

With rare exceptions, Dutch children were named after relatives. In particular, the first two boys and first two girls were generally named after their grandparents. Other practices were more tendencies than customs:

- naming the first child for a paternal grandparent

- naming the first child (if a boy) of a woman's second marriage for her first husband
- alternating each child's name to be taken from one side of the family and then the other;
- giving the name of a child who died to the next child born of that gender. The last practice tended to take precedence over naming a child for a grandparent.

NAME VARIATIONS

IX. The Diminutive

Diminutive names include both shortened names and terms of endearment.

- *Thys* for *Matthys*
- *Claes* for *Nicolaes*
- *Jaap* for *Jacob*, and
- *Bartel*, *Mees*, or *Meus* for *Bartelmeus*

Diminutives were extensively used for girls' names, both in abbreviation and in endearment. Similar to the *-ie* and *-y* suffix in English (e.g. *Jenny* or *Susie*) is the Dutch *-tje* or *-je*.

- *Maritje* for *Maria* (endearing)
- *Giertje* for *Geertruy* (endearing)
- *Grietje* for *Margriet* (endearing and abbreviated)
- *Tryntje* for *Catrina* (endearing and abbreviated)

X. Dutch-English Equivalents of First Names

Lists have been compiled of English equivalents of Dutch names, but use those lists with caution. In actual practice, the rendering of a Dutch person's name was the result of a number of variables, including phonetic spelling, varying pronunciation in Dutch, English, and French, and the skills of the clerk.

XI. Translation of the Foreign Name: Dutch, English, French

Dutch magistrates and clerks in New Netherland generally attempted to render foreign names into Dutch.

- *Carel van Brugge* or *Verbruggen* is actually Englishman Charles Bridges
- *Willem Kerck* is actually Englishman William Churchill

Names were also translated from Dutch to English:

- *Kuyper* became Cooper
- *van Langevelt* became Longfield
- *Thomas Laurenszen Poppinga* became *Thomas Lawrence*

The same is true for French names:

- Nicholas Dupue's wife is recorded in Dutch church records of New York City as *Catharina Reynards*, *Catalina Duvois*, *Catharina de Vos*, and *Catharina Reynardt*. *Reynard* and *Vos* are the same, as they are the French and Dutch words for *fox*.

XII. Alteration of the Foreign Name: Dutch, English, French

When a name couldn't be effectively translated, phonetic spelling came into play. These were close approximations in pronunciation, producing names that did not exist in Dutch, a hint to their non-Dutch origins.

- The French Adrienne Cuvellier became *Ariaentje Cuvilje*
- The English George Woolsey became *Jarge Woltzen*

Other phonetic spellings produced actual Dutch names that sounded the same, perhaps obscuring a non-Dutch origin.

- The English *Cole* sounds precisely the same as the Dutch *Cool*.
- The English *Lake* sounds precisely the same as the Dutch *Leek*

FURTHER STUDY

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Hear Dutch Here / Nieuw Nederland: Old New York. (<https://www.heardutchhere.net/OldNewYork.html> : 10 June 2020). On a website that teaches Dutch, this particular page pronounces many names from New Netherland and early New York, including place names, personal names, ship names, and some titles and occupations.

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Margino, Megan. "How to Research Dutch Ancestors." New York Public Library (<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2015/10/26/research-dutch-ancestors> : 10 June 2020). Originally posted 26 October 2015.

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