

HISTORY OF THE DEWITT NAME

The country of origin for the DeWitts is Holland, located in northern Europe, it is also called The Netherlands. The DeWitt family had a great heritage with many of them being aristocrats. The DeWitts died for their country while many others escaped and left their country to find freedom from tyranny.

It is believed that the surname DeWitt did not originate from Holland but from France. The DeWitt family did stay long enough in Holland to be native. The evidence is strong that long before Holland the DeWitt's (spelled deWitt, deWhitt as well as many other spellings) were from France.

Following is a portion of an article about the DeWitt family which was translated from Dutch into English. It maintains that the DeWitt's in France in the 1700s and 1800s came from a DeWitt lineage that lived in Amsterdam while a separated distinctive DeWitt lineage originated in Dordrecht, Netherlands.



DE GESLACHTEN DE WITT te Dordrecht en te Amsterdam
published in :
DE NEDERLANDSCHE HERAUT
in 1886
by C. A. van Sypesteyn

The DeWitt's of Dordrecht

Already in the 13th and 14th century we can find members of this family on the list of burgomasters and other regents of Dordrecht. They called themselves "die Witte" or "de Witte" or de Witt" and the spelling changes several times until most of them accepted "de Witt" as a final version. Most of them, because even during the life of Raadspensionaris ⁽¹⁾ de Witt, two of his cousins were calling themselves Johan de Wit and Gijsbert de With.

The family always remained in Dordrecht, and was always respected a lot and supplied a lot of government personnel. One of them was born on 7th February 1519, Jacob de Witt.

He married Anna van den Corput, had 2 sons and 2 daughters. In the appendix it is clearly shown which descendants from the famous brothers de Witt still can be found. From this it seems that the two sons of the ruwaard (sheriff) Cornelis de Witt died without marrying, while the eldest son of Raadspensionaris ⁽¹⁾ de Witt, also called Johann, married his cousin Wilhelmina de Witt, the youngest daughter of the ruwaard van Putten. The two sons from this marriage between cousins were the only great grandchildren of Mr. Jacob de Witt, because Raadspensionaris ⁽¹⁾ Jacob de Witt's youngest son died without marrying.

The eldest of the two brothers, Mr. Johan de Witt (died 27th May 1751, Brussels) left no male heirs, for his only son was not married when he died in 1783.

Mr. Cornelis de Witt, heer (viscount) van Jaarsvelt, the youngest grandson of the Raadspensionaris had two married sons. The eldest was Mr. Johan, who had a son Mr. Cornelis de Witt, born 20th August 1742. He married in 1780, but died without an heir. With him died the lineage of Mr. Jacob de Witt and his famous sons. The youngest brother, Mr. Herman Cornelis de Witt died on 23th November 1778. He left one daughter, Maria de Witt, who married in 1798 with Mr. Hermanus Hogg. Maria de Witt died on 1st April 1861 as the last descendant of Jacob de Witt.

During the life of the Raadspensionaris⁽¹⁾ there were a lot of family members, cousins in varying degree with names like de With, de Wit or de With. Most probably these left male descendants. The best way to track down their genealogy is to study the family coat of arms. The coat of arms of the de Witt family (Dordrecht) was a sinopel field with a hare, chased by a whippet and with a hound in the bottom of the shield. All animals are silver coloured.

(1) Raadspensionaris = highest civil servant in the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands (1568 - 1798), comparable with Prime Minister. The brothers de Witt rules the Netherlands from the mid seventeenth century till 1672 while Stadhouder Willem III grew up. They were brutally murdered in the Hague, while French, German and English troops invaded the Netherlands (1672 - "the disaster year", floods and hurricane that destroyed Utrecht were other disasters). Willem III took control of the country and ousted the German and French. The Dutch navy humiliated the English and even ended up on the Thames, bombing Chatham

The DeWitt's of Amsterdam

The first of this old and influential regent family is Pieter DeWitt, born in Amsterdam around 1520, merchant and captain of the Civil Guard. He was decapitated on 9th October 1568 and left from his marriage to Ottilia Sybrands Buijck, three sons and one daughter. Among his descendants we find a lot of Amsterdam Government personnel like Pieter DeWitt, RAAD (council member) (1702), regent of the Dutch East Indies Company, Mr. Jan DeWitt, RAAD secretaries and RAAD, Mr. Francois DeWitt, Burgomaster. The latter married in 1743 with Alida Johanna Degraff Van Polsbroek. Their son, Jan DeWitt, Schepen (local authority, type of police) (1782), RAAD (1785) was a fervent patriot (pro-French activist) and immigrated to France in 1787. He married on 1st April 1779 in Amsterdam with Johanna Wilhelmina Clifford, daughter of Jan and Anna Wolters. He stayed in France until 1795 and became a member of the Amsterdam Municipality. He became the Bataafse Republiek (Republic after the French invasion of 1795, changed into a kingdom by Napoleon) Ambassador to Switzerland in 1796. He was very rich and very fond of building. He spent so much money on building the estate Elsenburgh near Maarssen that he had to sell it again. He left shortly in Baden-Baden before moving to the Quartier Breda in Paris to build a number of projects that were so successful that he left a huge inheritance. He died on 12th September 1809 in a castle at Conde Suriton.

He had three sons; one of them died young. The eldest, Jan Francois DeWitt was Captain in the French service and died in France in 1805, both his children died young.

The second son, Willem Cornelis DeWitt, was born in Amsterdam on 26th July 1781 and became a French citizen in 1806. He became Auditeureau Conseil

D'Etat and from 1811 to 1813 Sous Prefet in Amsterdam. He died in Paris on 16th May 1834.

In Prilly by Lausanne he had married Suzanna Carolina Temminck, daughter of Jacob and Alida Van Stamhorst on 20th November 1823. They had two sons and a daughter.

The eldest son, Coenraad Jacob Dyonis Cornelis DeWitt, was born in Paris on 15th November 1824. He became Conseiler General Van Calvados and administrator of the mines in La Grande Combe. He married in March 1850 to Henriette Elizabert Guizot, daughter of Prime Minister Francois Guizot and Marguerite Andree Eliza de La Croix-Dillon. Two daughters from this marriage are still alive; both married to gentlemen named Schlumberger.

The second son, Cornelis Henry DeWitt was born in Paris on 20th November 1828 became Depute and Under-Secretary of State for Internal Affairs. He was married in Paris on 18th May 1850 with Pauline Jeanne Guizot, sister of Henriette Elisaberth as mentioned above. From this marriage came many children among them four sons.

From the above it is clear that the DeWitt's in Paris belong to the very old family of Amsterdam and that there is no relation with the DeWitt's of Dordrecht.

The Coat of Arms is entirely different. It is an azure field with a flying, silver dove and three leaves of clover below.

DIFFERENT DEWITT COAT OF ARMS



A BIT OF DUTCH HISTORY – 1600S

In the early 1600s, the government in the Netherlands was not strongly centralized. Each of the provinces jealously guarded and preserved its special privileges and customs, a practice which continued for a long time. These differences in dialect and social customs frequently transferred to the Dutch settlements in America, as each settlement reflected the locality in the Netherlands from which each group originated.

It was not until 1648 that the new northern state known as the Netherlands, the Dutch Republic and Holland came into existence through the Treaty of Munster. The government was a loose confederation of seven provinces with state lands called Brabant and Limburg. The state lands were not given provincial status until many years later. The government established by the Treaty of Munster lasted until 1795.

The economic preponderance of the Province of Holland, as compared to other provinces, also helped give unity to the fragmented state. Most of the Dutch financial and commercial enterprises were located in Holland. Holland regularly contributed over half of the National Budget. Because of its financial dominance, Holland had a commanding voice in the conducting of the government, and it was the great importance of Holland that made it commonplace to refer to the whole Netherlands as Holland.

When the Dutch began colonizing, they were not originally too interested in North America. They preferred the more lucrative tropical products and the Baltic trade. Cod season off of the Newfoundland coast coincided with herring season nearer to home. To improve their dominance in the tropical products trade, the Dutch were busy establishing colonies in Brazil. Exploring vessels were sent between 1609 and 1614. It was this period in time when the Dutch became mildly interested in trade with the American Indians and finding a northeast passage through North America to the Orient. In 1609, an Englishman by the name of Henry Hudson was hired by the Dutch to find a northeast passage through the new world to the Orient and India. The voyage of Hudson's ship, The Halve Moon, failed to find such a passage, but Hudson brought back detailed maps and information on the northeast coast of North America.

In North America, the Dutch claimed the land between the Delaware River and the Connecticut River. This territory was 175 miles in width at the coastline, a territory which became known as New Netherland.

In New Netherland, Fort Nassau was established about 1614 on the upper Hudson River at Castle Island, later destroyed by floods in 1617. Fort Orange was built on the west bank of the Hudson River and later became the nucleus for present day Albany. In 1623, officials of the Dutch West Indies Company were permitted to establish and govern the colonies as they saw fit.

Most of the colonists that came to the New Netherlands during the 1623 to 1624 time period

were either Protestant refugees, Walloons from the Spanish Netherlands, or Huguenots from France. They settled at Fort Orange, Governor's Island, off of the tip of Manhattan Island and south on the Delaware River. (called South River) It was at this location near what is today Gloucester, NJ, that the next Fort Nassau was later built. It was not long afterward that this fort was abandoned because of conflict with the Quakers. (The Quakers tended to be very clannish and would trade only with their own. If a Quaker were selling something for 100 pounds and a Dutchman were selling the same thing for only 50 pounds, the Quaker would buy from the Quaker. Being the merchants that they were, the Dutch did not find this a very lucrative way to live.)

In 1625, Cryn Fredericksz, the new governor of the New Netherlands, built Fort Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. The settlement which grew up around this fort became known as New Amsterdam or today New York City. Fredericksz was replaced by Governor Verhulst. Governor Verhulst moved the Delaware colonists to Manhattan Island and the colonists at Fort Orange were permitted to stay where they were.

In 1626, Pieter Minuit took over for Verhulst and purchased Manhattan Island from the Indians. In 1635, Fort Nassau on the Delaware River was regarrisoned. A trading post was established in what is now Philadelphia and was abandoned a short time later.

In 1640, persons of limited economic means were encouraged to settle in the New Netherlands by being promised 200 acres of land to each person who went to the colony with 5 souls above 15 years of age. They had to settle the area given within 3 years with 50 people. These patronships, however, were not successful.

In 1644 and up to 1654, 200 Dutch soldiers and refugees from the failed Brazil colonies arrived in New Amsterdam. Between 1654 and 1659, small groups of boys and girls from poorhouses and orphan asylums were transported to New Netherland. They were under contract to work for a time and given freedom afterward. Be aware that some Dutch were coming to America through the auspices of Sweden during this time.

In 1664, the English began their takeover of New Netherland. Governor Pieter Stuyvesant wanted to fight the English, and defend the Dutch colony. The Domini, or Reformed Dutch Church Pastor, convinced Stuyvesant that the Dutch were outgunned and that it was senseless to fight, and thus Governor Stuyvesant surrendered to the English. Since the Dutch interest was commercial gain, the English did not interfere or restrict Dutch trading.

In the early 1660s, some of the Dutch began moving south into New Jersey, establishing Bergen (now Jersey City), and Hackensack in Bergen County, New Jersey. At this time Bergen, or Jersey City, was also part of Bergen County. The settlements were small and grew along the waterways. The Reformed Dutch Church grew along with the settlements.

THE FOUR DIFFERENT DEWITTS IN AMERICA

Did you know ... that DeWitt is the 1,446th most popular last name (surname) in the United States with a frequency of 0.009%?

Being a DeWitt means you have a zillion DeWitt relatives spread all over the world. The DeWitt name in the Netherlands is as common as Smith is in the United States. It seems that DeWitts loved children (to the extent of 10-12 children families) and loved to move about the world and the growing United States throughout its history. Unfortunately, many generations of DeWitts found more important things to do than write down who was related to whom. There seems to be 4 possible lines of DeWitts in the United States.

The Kingston, New York DeWitts

The most famous Kingston, NY DeWitts, is Tjerck deWitt who was born in Holland about 1620 but lived most of his life in the Kingston, NY area until 1700. A great deal of information is available on Tjerck and his ancestors. You can read all the way back to 1295 without only a controversial bump here and there on the road.

The Long Island, New York DeWitts

The Long Island DeWitts patriarch is Pieter Volckers DeWitt who was born in Leiden, Netherlands in 1624. These DeWitts migrated west through New Jersey and into Pennsylvania. It is from this DeWitt clan that we descended.

The Virginia DeWitts

Jacob DeWitt is the head of the Virginia DeWitts. He was born in the Netherlands around 1600. He died in Henrico, Virginia in 1674 and produced a clan that lived in eastern Virginia and South Carolina.

The French DeWitts

In 2009 DeWitt historians and genealogists discovered via DNA analysis that there may be a fourth DeWitt clan that settled in the United States. Current research indicates this clan may have come from France.

PIETER VOLCKERS DEWITT → PIETER JANS DEWITT → BARENT DEWIT VAN COHN OF COHN, HOLLAND

Our ancestry descends from the The Long Island, New York DeWitts. They originated in Leiden, Netherlands in the 1600's.

