First Families

When a man in New Amsterdam wanted to get ahead, his most important task was to find a well-connected wife.

BY DAVID WILLIAM VOORHEES

BY 1642 NEW AMSTERDAM DESPERATELY NEEDED A NEW CHURCH. THE BARN-LIKE STRUCTURE IN WHICH the Dutch Reformed congregation had been meeting was rotting and overcrowded. Yet the government was unable to find the funds for a new building. At the June wedding of Dutch West India Company surgeon Hans Kierstede and Sara Roelofse, daughter of the renowned Anneke Jans, Company Director Willem Kieft came up with a novel plan. After "the fourth or fifth round of drinking," he shrewdly told wedding guests how much he would give to construct a new church. "All then with light heads subscribed largely, competing one with the other."

The building of a new church marked a turning point in New Amsterdam's development from a tentative European outpost into a solid civic entity. Kieft recognized, however, that in New Amsterdam's frontier-like social conditions, the concept of civic responsibility remained wishful thinking. He thus relied upon the competitive spirit that was driving the city's emerging elite. At the top of this new social order stood a group of self-made men who, taking advantage of the fluid social conditions of a frontier outpost, forged familial and professional ties with Dutch mercantile syndicates and government officials that gave them an edge in the city's expanding trade. What rooted these men in New Netherland, as we shall see, was a family of local women.

FACING PAGE: Matriarch Anneke Jans (1605-1663) owned a farm that stretched from present-day Warren Street to just above Canal Street. It was the basis for a series of lawsuits begun in the 1740s and lasting until the 1930s.

Kinship ties launched these men forward and created the competitive divisions that spurred New York City's early economic, political, and cultural development.

If New York has an Eve, she is Sara Roelofse's grandmother, Tryn Jonas van Maesterland. By the time of the American Revolution virtually every member of New York's elite claimed her as an ancestor. Tryn was born in obscurity in an impoverished fishing village on the island of Marstrand (in Dutch, Maesterland) and married an unknown seaman. Her story and that of her descendants is the ultimate New York success story.

Tryn Jonas initially settled with her husband on the island of Vlecker, Norway, but Amsterdam, with its thriving fishing and mercantile fleets, was a magnet for seamen. The area surrounding St. Anthonispoort in the city's oldest section became a slum as immigrants from Dutch, Flemish, German, and Scandinavian fishing villages like young Tryn crowded the damp basements and rickety garrets of its late medieval structures. When Tryn's husband died, her future became tied to that of her daughters. By 1633 she was living in New Netherland at de Laets Burg farm, a farm managed by her son-in-law Roelof Janssoon near present-day Albany. The following year the family left for Manhattan. There, West India Company Director Wouter van Twiller employed Tryn as the New Amsterdam midwife and had a "small house" built for her at company expense.

In New Netherland,

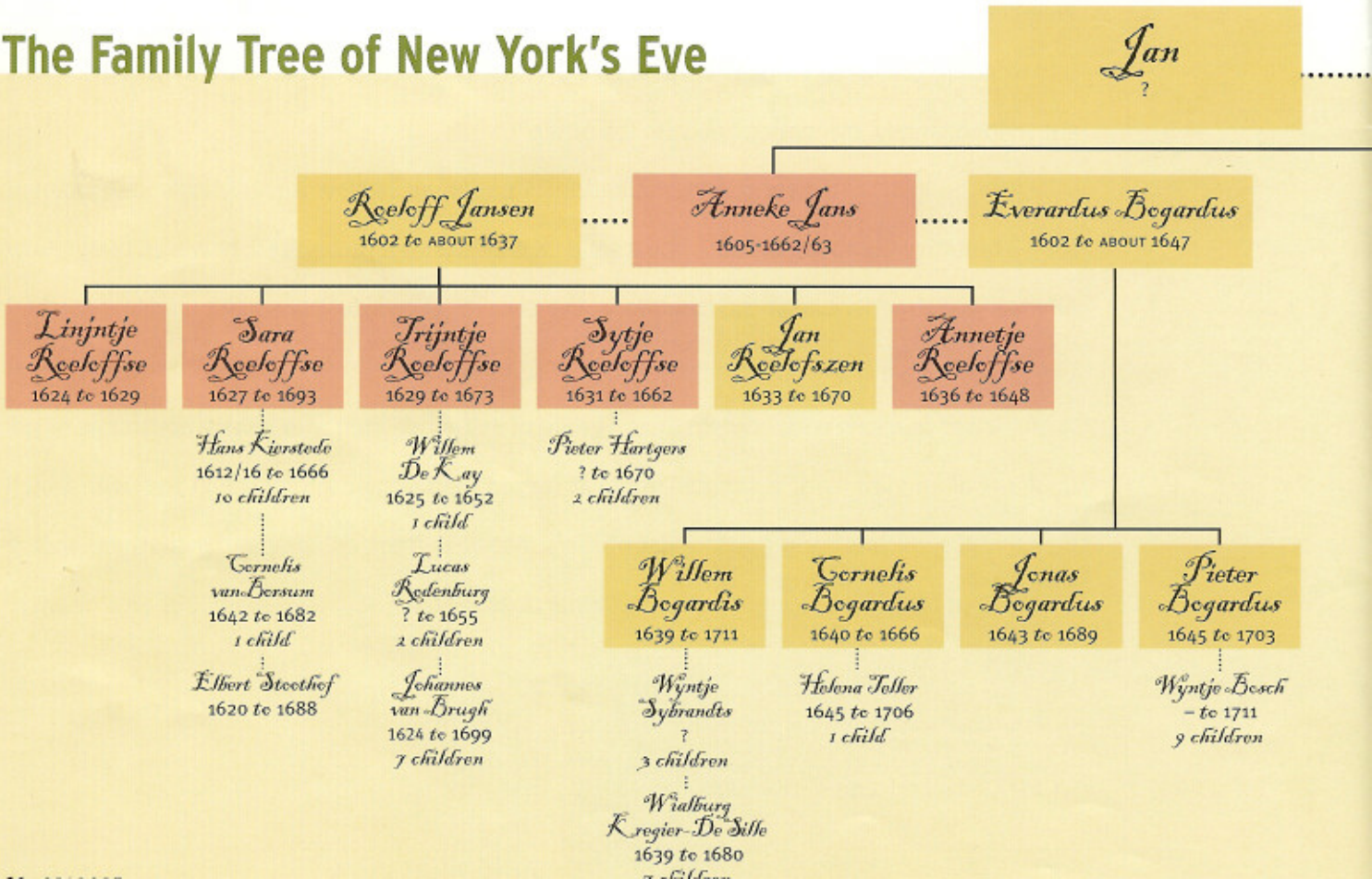
where childbirth — still cloaked in medieval superstition — was hazardous and parentage often questionable, the illiterate Tryn's role as midwife conferred on her a higher status than she would have enjoyed in Europe. Although she did not leave a substantial estate when she died in 1645, she left a legacy more valuable in a community where females were scarce: two attractive, healthy, and fertile daughters.

Rome has its Romulus and Remus, and New York City has its Anneke Jans and Marritje Jans. Tryn's two daughters and their offspring attracted increasingly richer merchants from the Dutch Atlantic world into their family to create an unparalleled power base. For example, after the death of her first husband, Roeloff Jansen, Anneke married New Amsterdam Domine (pastor) Everardus Bogardus. Her Manhattan farm, extending from present-day Warren Street to just above Canal Street, became the basis for a series of infamous lawsuits between her descendants and Trinity Corporation, beginning in the 1740s and lasting until the 1930s.

Anneke's sister Marritje successively married company ship's carpenter Tymen Jansen, land speculator Cornelis Dircksz, and, finally, New Amsterdam merchant, Govert Loockermans, whose 52,702-guilder estate at the time of his death in 1671 made him New York City's richest merchant.

Corporate growth and individual economic advancement in the pre-industrial world resulted from the merger of families. The career of Marritje Jans's third husband, Govert Loockermans, reveals how important marital ties could be. Loockermans arrived in New Amsterdam in 1633 as a twenty-one-year-old cook's mate aboard the *St. Martyn*, which also brought the new

The Family Tree of New York's Eve



West India Company (WIC) director, Wouter van Twiller. Impressed by Loockermans, Van Twiller took him into service as a company clerk. He continued to work in that capacity until 1639, when the WIC opened up trade to private individuals.

In 1641 Loockermans became New Netherland agent for the Amsterdam firm of Gillis Verbrugge and married Verbrugge's widowed niece, Adriantje Jans. Adriantje's previous husband, Jan Hendrickse van de Water, had been active with his brothers, Isaack and Jacob, in the Arctic trade. More important for American development, Isaack van de Water and Gillis Verbrugge were in 1637 among the Dutch financial backers of a Swedish colony on the Delaware River promoted by disillusioned WIC director Samuel Bloomart and directed by former New Netherland director Peter Minuit. Jan Hendricksz, who subsequently disappeared at sea during a hurricane, captained the *Key of Kalmar*, lead ship of the two vessels the Swedish South Sea Company sent to the Delaware River under Minuit's direction in 1637-1638. Adriantje's sister, Hester Jans, was married to Jacob Wolfertsen van Couwenhoven, another prominent New Netherland merchant. And Loockermans' sister, Anna, married rapidly rising New Amsterdam merchant Oloff van Cortlandt.

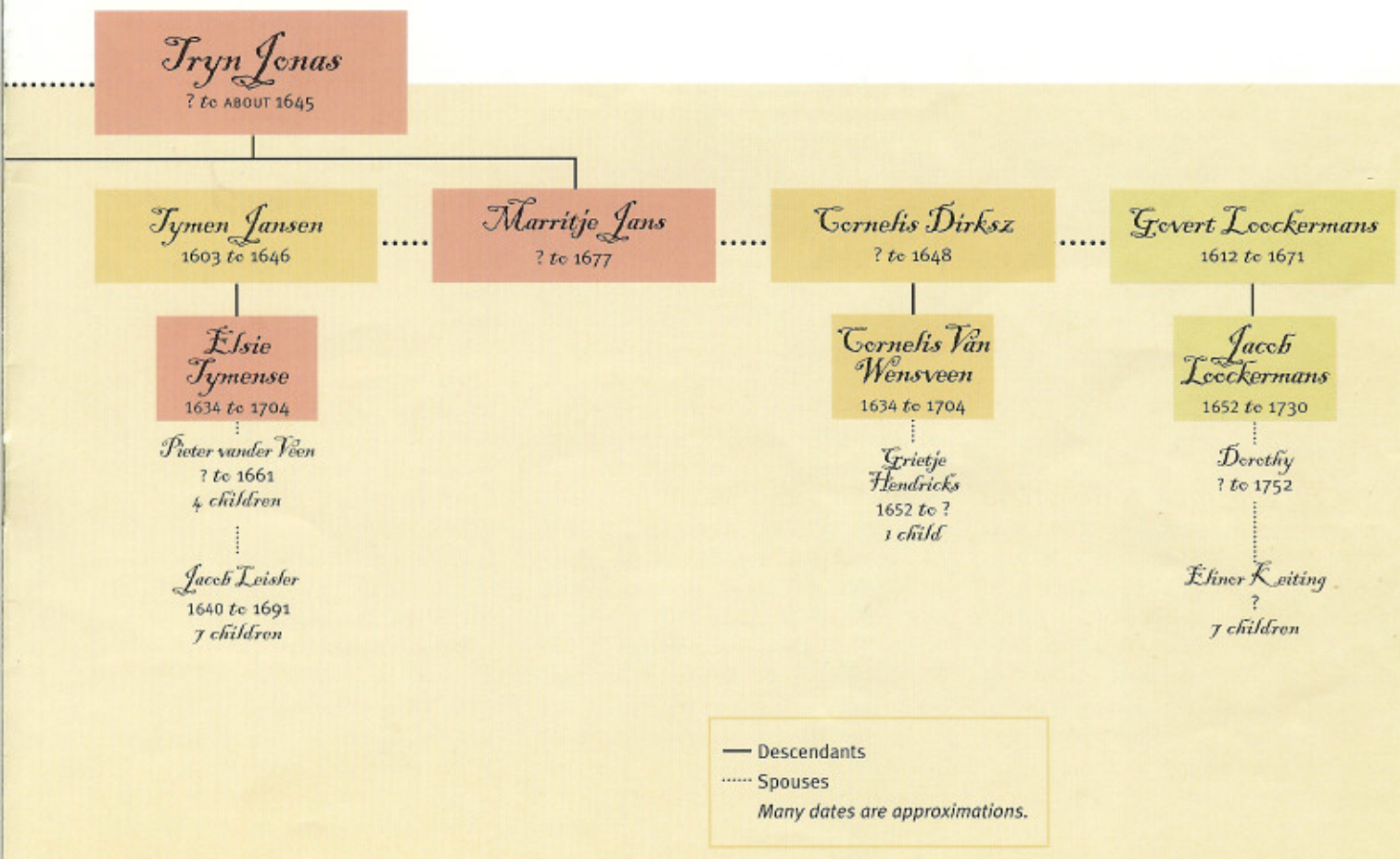
Loockermans' extensive kinship ties in the Atlantic World provided him an edge in New Amsterdam's growing trade. Along with his brothers-in-law, Domine Everardus Bogardus, Jacob van Couwenhoven, and Oloff van Cortlandt, he became a outspoken proponent for the creation of a municipal government for New Amsterdam. The WIC's 1653 granting of municipal government to the community opened up additional trade opportunities, and the results were clearly evident.

By 1664, the forty-year-old town was booming. In a dozen years New Amsterdam's population jumped three fold to more than 1,500 inhabitants, the size of a prosperous provincial European market town. Moreover, the establishment of a municipal government enhanced these merchants' role and made them independent of the company officials who had formerly dominated the town.

Despite the failure of the 1657 Great Burgher Right — an attempt to confer important offices only on men of wealth — the kinship network centered on Anneke and Marritje Jans managed to obtain hegemony over the city's economic and political life.

The spouses of Anneke Jans's three daughters included WIC surgeon Hans Kierstede; wealthy merchant and New Amsterdam fiscal Willem de Key; WIC Curaçao director Lucas Rodenburg; Pieter Hartgers, brother of noted Amsterdam bookseller and printer Joost Hartgers; and Johannes Pietersz Verbrugge, or Van Brugh, another member of the Amsterdam mercantile house of Verbrugge. Her sons' spouses included daughters of New Netherland councilor and noted poet, Nicaisius de Sille, and Beverwijck merchant Willem Teller.

Marritje Jans's daughter, Elsie, married first the company's senior ship's carpenter, Pieter Cornelisz vander Veen, then well-connected German–born merchant Jacob



Leisler, while her son, Cornelis, married a daughter of New Amsterdam bread inspector Hendrick Willemszen. Their relations soon also included Stuyvesants, Bayards, Van Rensselaers, Schuylers, Philipses, De Peysters, and Provoosts, thus creating a commercial aristocracy that would endure for generations.

In Dutch fashion, carefully planned marriages of daughters brought new men with good connections into the family, thus expanding the family's hold on offices. By the late 1680s, for example, twelve of the twenty-two city militia officers were directly related by blood or marriage to Anneke and Marritje Jans. As one historian noted of Dutch oligarchies, "men could not pick their sons, but they could surely control who became their sons-in-law."

Beginning in the 1670s the familial unity that propelled New York's leading merchants forward began to fracture. At root was the competitive spirit that Kieft had so craftily manipulated in 1642 when he needed to corral community support for a new church. As the older generation passed, the division of their estates now turned contentious. The conflict between Dutch inheritance law, which favored equal division among children, and English inheritance law, which favored primogeniture or descent to the eldest son, aggravated dissension. Disputes over the Van Rensselaer, Govert Loockermans, Thomas Delavall, and Cornelis Steenwijck estates are among the better known of these suits. Contestants courted official favor and public opinion to support their competing claims. Factions arose as a method to promote the particular interests. Religiously based ideological claims were subsequently employed to legitimize the factions.

By the late 1680s, the contestants in the various suits and their supporters were coalescing into two distinct and warring factions. When royal authority in New York collapsed in the wake of England's 1688 Glorious Revolution, which replaced the Roman Catholic King James II with the Protestant William, Prince of Orange, and his wife Mary (James's daughter), the quarreling families now openly vied for control of the provincial government.

In June 1689, Jacob Leisler, who had been battling his Bayard, Kierstede, and Van Cortlandt in-laws over the Loockermans estate for nearly two decades, emerged as opposition leader and immediately set about to destroy his in-laws' political base. "This arbitrary proud person Leysler, exalted himself above his bretheren [and] disdains to own his very kindred unless they will entitle him Lieutenant Governor," Nicholas Bayard wrote of his in-law in 1690.

A foretaste of this bitter political struggle may be seen in the contest over the estate of New Amsterdam burgomaster Cornelis Steenwijck, who died in 1684. Steenwijck's children had already died, and his widow, Margaret de Riemer, subsequently married New York City Dutch Reformed Domine Henricus Selijns in 1686. Selijns and Steenwijck's half-brother and sister, Jacob and Anna Mauritz, now laid claim to the estate. Drawn into the fray on Selijns' side were Bayards, Van Cortlandts, and De Keys, while Gouverneurs, Staatses, and Provoosts sided with the Mauritzes. The dispute eventually escalated into riots.

Once in power, Jacob Leisler hounded and imprisoned his in-laws on charges of "papism," and appointed courts that ruled favorably in the estate interests of his faction. Although religion, class, and ethnicity undoubtedly played a role in the rebellion, the longstanding intrafamilial feuds between the leaders of both factions must be taken into account.

In 1690 Bayard named the "principal authors of our principal miseries": Jacob Leisler, Jacob Milborne, Samuel Edsall, George Beekman, Peter Delanoy, Samuel Staats, Thomas Williams, Jonathan Cowenhoven, Benjamin Blagge, Hendrick Jansen, and Hendrick Cuyler. Each of these men was either a litigant in, or related by marriage to a party in, the estate feuds.

Familial feuding reached an operatic crescendo in 1691. When King William III's royal governor, Henry Sloughter, arrived, Leisler's in-laws rushed to greet the new governor to relate their version of events. The faction that supported Leisler was thrown into jail and had their estates confiscated on charges of treason.

In May 1691, Jacob Leisler and Jacob Milborne, who had recently become Leisler's son-in-law, were beheaded. For a decade Milborne had been in litigation with Robert Livingston. Spying Livingston in the crowd at the scaffold, Milborne threatened to testify against him in the afterlife: "you have caused the King [that] I must now die. But before gods tribunal I will implead you for the same."

The execution of Leisler and Milborne did not end the family wrangle. As Leisler's in-laws and their relations seized control of the disputed Loockermans and other estates, appeals to the crown in England by Jacob Leisler, Jr., Abraham Gouverneur, Jacob Mauritz, Benjamin Blagge, and Kiliaen van Rensselaer resulted in Parliament's reversal of the sentence of treason against Leisler and his adherents. With their political rights restored, Leisler's family now sought revenge upon their relations.

Although the party factionalism spawned by the estate feuds continued to rend New York's political fabric for decades, the same forces eventually caused the family to rapidly close ranks primarily through intermarriage. As early as the 1690s, cousins from the feuding family factions began to wed. The most dramatic of these unions was undoubtedly the marriage in 1729 of Leisler's granddaughter Elizabeth Rynders and Nicholas Bayard the Younger, grandson and sole heir of Leisler's bitter enemy, Nicholas Bayard. Ironically, then, all the descendants of Nicholas Bayard are also descendants of his arch-rival, Jacob Leisler. Indeed, when Bayard's Manhattan estate was later incorporated into the urban fabric, the streets were named after Leisler's daughters Hester and Elizabeth, as well as members of the Bayard family.

The oligarchy that emerged in New Amsterdam continued to dominate New York society and politics for the next two centuries. It would not be until the so-called "palace revolution" of the 1870s, brought about by the new wealth created by industrialization and so eloquently described in the novels of Edith Wharton, that the old family-based power structure truly began to wane.

David William Voorhees is director of the Papers of Jacob Leisler Project at New York University and editor of de Halve Maen, *a journal devoted to New Netherland studies published by The Holland Society of New York.*

The Kierstede Family

In 1647, Hans Kierstede, a German-born surgeon (chirugeon) for the Dutch West India Company (but now in private practice), and his Dutch wife Sara Roelofs, received a patent for land along the East River waterfront (Pearl Street) at the corner of present-day Whitehall Street. There they built a house for their growing family. Sara was the daughter of Anneke Jans, the step-daughter of Dominie Everardus Bogardus and the granddaughter of Tryntje Jonas, one of the Dutch West India Company's midwives.

In addition to her domestic duties, Sara (who was fluent in Native American dialects), also served as Governor Stuyvesant's Indian interpreter. She maintained her cordial relationship with the country's first inhabitants by setting aside a portion of her yard where Native American women could string wampum and weave baskets, and it was in front of her house in 1662, that the city erected a market where Indians could trade.

The privy on the Kierstede property was abandoned about 1685, long after the Doctor's death in 1666 and Sara's subsequent remarriage. At that time, their daughter Blandina and her husband Petrus Bayard were living on the property. Bayard was a hatter by trade and the nephew of Governor Stuyvesant. Artifacts thrown into the privy included gaming pieces that were fashioned (perhaps by slaves) from broken ceramic vessels, metal objects such as a candlestick holder, candlesnuffer, spoon and drawer pull. There were also hundreds of clay pipe fragments, most of which had been imported from the Netherlands, suggesting that members of the Bayard household (perhaps even Blandina) were still smoking Dutch pipes long after the British takeover of Nieuw Amsterdam in 1664.

The second privy on the Kierstede property was constructed of red brick and was probably installed by the Bayards when the earlier privy was abandoned. The datable trash inside this privy suggested that the family used it until sometime after Blandina's death in 1702 and the last Kierstede descendants had moved from the property. Objects found included marbles, a Chinese porcelain saucer, hundreds of English clay pipes, (suggesting that the Bayards had finally made the switch to English pipes), distinctively Dutch porridge bowls, English wine bottles and wineglasses, a pewter plate and metal tankard. Food remains were also found: egg shells and oysters, beef bones and fish scales.

ABOVE, LEFT: **Wine/Liquor Bottle, 1685-1700, England.** Glass, redware with ginger-green lead glaze. In Van Tienhoven's household, wine was drunk from onion-shaped English bottles. *89.3.84*

ABOVE, RIGHT: **Saucers, seventeenth century, China. Hard paste porcelain, blue floral decoration.** A fascination with things Chinese swept through Europe and North America in the seventeenth century, as trade with the East introducted the West to tea, spices, fine silks, lacquered items and porcelain. The Van Tienhovens probably used these saucers (the cups are missing) when tea was served to guests. *89.3.90, 89.3.91*