

Netherlandic Mennonite Historical Genealogy

A Mennonite Dynasty in Danzig

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Introduction

In a recent article I described a Mennonite economic dynasty comprising the Fast, Toews, and Heese families in the Eastern Ukrainian Mennonite settlement of Chortitza. These families were entrepreneurial and through several generations developed and operated many businesses. The three families established deep marital interrelationships. I postulated that they mingled in the same social circles, thus facilitating marital opportunities and I speculated that this had the effect, whether intentional or not, of concentrating the wealth of the families and preserving the ability of future generations to continue the entrepreneurial tradition.

The subject of the current article is another Mennonite dynasty. This one existed in the Danzig area from the late 16th century through the 17th century. The history of the families comprising this dynasty indicates that during the period when marital relationships were being established and the dynasty flourished, the families were wealthy. In most cases the wealth derived from economic pursuits, but one family probably belonged to the Polish Prussian upper class. In later years, and particularly by the time their descendants lived in the Mennonite settlements of Eastern Ukraine, the wealth had dissipated.

These families were Harnasveger, Maraun, de Veer, de Momper and von Roy.

The Harnasveger Family

Jacob Harnasveger lived in Amsterdam during a frantic and dangerous period of the Protestant Reformation, when the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor made disagreement with the tenets of the Catholic Church a heretical act subject to extreme punishment. Born about 1480, he made his living as an armorer, a trade he passed down to at least one grandson. He became embroiled in a radical anabaptist plot to overthrow the Catholic administration of Amsterdam in 1534, a crime for which he avoided execution but was condemned to banishment from the city for two years. [1]

There are two clues that the Harnasveger family was well off. First, his granddaughter Deborah married into the de Veer family, a family known to be influential and wealthy. Second, an impressive property inventory survives for his grandson, Jan, also an armorer. The inventory was taken by an estate agent in 1611 at Jan's house on Van Breestraat. It reads as follows. 2 maps of the entire world, 1 map, 1 painting of a flowerpot, 2 elongated landscapes by Emaus, 1 smallish landscape, 1 painting of six canary birds, 2 deer heads, 4 hanging plates, 1 piece of gold calligraphy. In the side room 4 paintings of the 4 Evangelists, 1 map of Netherlands, 1 landscape.

In the inner room: 1 ship painting, 1 painting of Moses, 1 painting of a ship in a storm, 1 country painting, 1 painting by Vroom. In the back room: 1 case painting with doors (triptych). In the front room: paintings of the 7 planets without frames, 9 gilded marble statues, 1 elongated painting for the fireplace. [2]

The painting by Vroom refers to Hendrick Vroom (1562 - 1640), a famous Dutch master during the Dutch Golden Age and the founder of the school of Dutch marine art. Vroom was a contemporary of such Golden Age painters as Rembrandt and Vermeer.

The Maraun Family

Joachim von Roy describes Georg Maraun as a member of "an important patrician family" in Königsberg and Danzig. It seems likely Maraun was born in the early 1500s in Königsberg, where he became an established businessman. His daughter, Gertrud Maraun, married Anthonius von Roy in 1587. [3]

The family name appears in Königsberg as early as the late fifteenth century and in Danzig in later years. There was a Matthaues Maraun, born in Königsberg-Kneiphof in the latter half of the fifteenth century. He was a Councillor and businessman. With his wife, Katharina, three children are identified. The eldest, Kurt, was born in Königsberg in 1490. He moved to Danzig where he was a Councillor and Magistrate. The second child, Georg, was also born in Königsberg and appears in school records in 1518. The third child was a daughter, Regina. She married Peter Glogau, another significant businessman from an elite Königsberg family. [4]

The de Veer Family

The de Veer family were thriving merchant traders on the sea route from Amsterdam to Danzig and other points on the Baltic coast. Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615) was among the Mennonites who established homes in Danzig in the last years of the sixteenth century. He purchased his Amsterdam citizenship in 1601. [5] Gysbert's progeny in Danzig managed the eastern hub of the family grain trading business. The children married well, as will be described below. His descendants in Amsterdam managed the western hub of the trading business. Some became well known in the foreign service of the Dutch colonial empire with important responsibilities for settling and governing Dutch holdings.

The de Momper Family

The de Momper family lineage has been traced to the fifteenth century in Belgium. The patriarch of the family, Jean de Momper lived in Bruges. He was a landscape painter of note. One son, Joos de Momper, moved to Amsterdam and converted to Calvinism during the Reformation. His descendants were important painters, art dealers, and guild masters. Several of his grandsons became Mennonites at the end of the seventeenth century. [6] One grandson, Anthony (1580-1659), emigrated to Danzig in about 1610. [7] We will see that Anthony's descendants established many family ties with the de Veer family.

In Danzig the de Momper name was changed to Momber, the form that will be used in the following discussion.

The von Roy Family

It seems likely that the von Roy family were important members of the Polish Prussian hierarchy. Joachim von Roy has published extensively on this topic with a view to tracing his lineage and associated heraldry. He believes that Anthonius von Roy (about 1560-?), who was married in 1587 at the Reformed Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Danzig, is the first von Roy ancestor to be associated with the Reform movement. As such he is probably the father of Wilhelm von Roy, whose children married into the Mennonite de Veer family. [8]

A Network of Marriages

In the beginning, Deborah Harnasveger (1560-1627), granddaughter of the armorer and radical reformer Jacob Harnasveger (1480-before 1563), married Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615) the Baltic Sea shipping magnate in Amsterdam in 1580. Deborah and Gysbert moved about between Amsterdam and Danzig at various times but ended their days in Danzig. Only a few years later Gertrud Maraun (about 1565-?), the daughter of the Königsberg-based patrician businessman Georg Maraun, married Anthonius von Roy (about 1560-?) the Polish Prussian aristocrat in Danzig in 1587.

The de Veer – von Roy Connections

Three grandchildren of Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615), children of his son Gysbert (1600-1646), married three grandchildren of Anthonius von Roy (about 1560-?), children of his son Wilhelm (about 1610-?). Philipp de Veer (1629-1683) married Magdalena von Roy (about 1637-1683), possibly in Danzig (date unknown); Gysbert de Veer (1640-1693) married Catharina von Roy (1639-1718) in Danzig in 1669; Agneta de Veer (1644-1680) married Peter von Roy (1644-1698) in Danzig in 1670.

Philipp de Veer (1629-1683) settled in Klein Mausdorf at some point, where he was an established freight broker. [9] Gysbert de Veer (1640-1693) was the patriarch of de Veer descendants who emigrated to the Mennonite settlements in Eastern Ukraine at the end of the eighteenth century. [10]

The de Veer –Momber Connections

Five descendants of Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615) married five descendants of Anthony Momber (1580-1659).

Abraham Momber (1650-1712), grandson of Anthony Momber (1580-1659) and son of Abraham, married Maria de Veer (1661-1742), great granddaughter of Gysbert de Veer (1556-

1615) and daughter of Berend. Abraham was a deacon and later a preacher in the Flemish congregation of Danzig. His wife Maria was a deaconess of this congregation. [11]

Isaac Momber (1623-?), son of Anthony Momber (1580-1659), married Sara de Veer (?-?), great granddaughter of Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615) and daughter of Abraham.

Herman Momber (1621-1669), son of Anthony Momber (1580-1659), married Deborah de Veer (about 1630-1677), granddaughter of Gysbert de Veer (1556-1615) and daughter of Abraham.

Sara Momber (about 1664-1735), granddaughter of Anthony Momber (1580-1659) and daughter of Herman Momber (1621-1669) married Gysbert de Veer (about 1671-1711). There is uncertainty about the parents of Gysbert de Veer. Michael Calmeyer has hinted that there could be a connection to Gysbert de Veer (1640-1693) and Hermann Thiessen has made this connection explicitly in his genealogical research papers. [12] Gysbert (about 1671-1711) was a Deacon in the church in Danzig. [13]

Barbara Momber (about 1667-1726), great granddaughter of Anthony Momber (1580-1659) and daughter of Anton, married Benjamin de Veer (about 1690-1743). There is uncertainty about the parents of Benjamin de Veer although the general suggestion is that he was a descendant of Gysbert de Veer (1640-1693). Barbara was considerably older than Benjamin and there is speculation that the marriage was arranged for financial reasons. The couple had no children and Barbara died within ten years of the marriage, leaving Benjamin to remarry.

Conclusion

The network of marital relationships among these families is vast and family ties recur generation after generation. No doubt the exclusive social circle of the wealthier families played a part in this pattern of relationships. It is also easy to imagine that familial arrangements were more than just random occurrences and that economic motivations could have contributed to the tight family ties.

Sources

[1] Odette Franssen, a genealogist in Netherlands, extracted this information from records in the Amsterdam Archives.

[2] The Montias Database of 17th Century Dutch Art Inventories, New York, The Frick Collection, research.frick.org.

[3] Joachim von Roy, *Beitrage zur Genealogie der westpreussischen Herren von Roy*, Bonn and Luneburg, Johanni, 1998, p. 11.

[4] Genealogical information was obtained from the research of Gerd P. v. Piwowski at <https://stammbaum.piwowski.org/index.php> and Holger Lilienthal at <https://gedbas.de/person/database/42619>.

[5] This information is a synthesis of observations made by Henry Schapansky and Horst Penner; Henry Schapansky, *Mennonite Migrations (and The Old Colony)*, Rosenort MB, Henry Schapansky, 2006, p. 79; Horst Penner, *Die ost - und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, Weierhof, Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein E.V., 1978, p. 349.

[6] Wilhelm Momber, "Momber family." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1957. Web. 17 Oct 2023. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Momber_family&oldid=146634.

[7] Horst Penner p. 302.

[8] Joachim von Roy, in a blog post on Heraldik im Netz, observed that the first record of a von Roy affiliating with Reformers is Anthonius when he married Gertrud Maraun in the Calvinist Church of Saint Peter and Paul in Danzig.

[9] Arlette Kouwenhoven, *The Fehrs*, Leiden, Winco Publishing, 2013, p. 44.

[10] Hermann Thiessen, Chart #1 Tabelle #A and Michael Calmeyer, *De Geschiedenis van het Geslacht de Veer van 1556 – 1929*, p. 20.

[11] Wilhelm Momber (see note 6).

[12] Hermann Thiessen, Chart #1 Tabelle #A and Michael Calmeyer, p. 20.

[13] (Transcribed by) Ernest. H Baergen, *Records of Prussian Mennonite Churches in the Vistula Delta*, Frame 124 (https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Records.htm).