

# *The Knickerbocker*

A newsletter dedicated to the Study of the History of the Knickerbocker Family and in support of the Mansion Restoration at Schaghticoke, NY.

- 4<sup>th</sup> Edition - spring 1998 -

**\*\*\*\* 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion - July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998 \*\*\*\***

The newsletter reappears after a longer than planned absence. Reports of your editor's demise are unfounded. This new format will make it easier to simultaneously publish the Newsletter on the Internet. I've been very busy establishing a World Wide Web site for the Knickerbocker family at <http://www.knic.com>. There are a few thousand electronic pages of family information, which are frequently updated. For those not interested in computers, please pay no heed. I intend to continue the printed newsletter a few times a year so everyone can share information and our family experience.

There are about 70 of us on-line that regularly exchange electronic mail. I have archived hundreds of pages of Knickerbocker related messages on our web site. I have posted several genealogies, much census information, queries, pictures and lots of other family tidbits that are difficult (or impossible) to distribute and update via print. If you have access to a computer (or get to know someone that does), please visit the site and join us on-line. The Internet is a great way to share family news and information with your cousins.

I was going to distribute this newsletter at the Reunion but Stana has scheduled a visit to First Albany Church at 5 on Reunion afternoon. I am sending it to those not on line because I wanted everyone to have advance notice so you could make a place in your schedule. Stana wants to keep expanding the activities at the Reunions. We don't want it to get stale (and if you don't show up we'll talk about you).

Stana and crew are up to their eyeballs doing what they do preparing the food and conducting the tours. We need a Knickerbocker program committee to organize the family activities. I NEED VOLUNTEERS AND A CHIEF-BOSS-SOMEONE TO CO-ORDINATE-SLAVE DRIVER-PERSON! I'll be tied up with genealogy and newsletter questions so I won't be of much help (I didn't get to eat last year because I was having so much fun - and please - no comments that missing a few meals, waistlines, etc.).

Stana has suggested a meet your cousin introduction at lunchtime (there is a PA system), or whatever else strikes our fancy. A DAR ceremony replacing the plaque on Johannes II's tomb is tentatively planned. How about a picture of every tombstone and record every inscription effort? Stana hopes to identify Harmen J's original property at Halfmoon and that would be a kick to visit. We desperately need ideas and help in organizing these activities and coming up with others.

I hope we can collect everyone's picture and a short biography this year. I've wanted to put together a Reunion Yearbook to document our extended family and our once a year gala get-together. I've tried to get a few snapshots but someone has to snag everyone as they sign in. I always get sidetracked. We need a video of the whole affair. I've done a few random video shots and shared them with those that can't attend, but a planned video might raise a few bucks for the Mansion window replacement fund. You have sent in your window contribution? Is anyone good with a camera and willing to become a roving nuisance / interrogator / documentary producer?

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## ANCESTRY OF HARMEN JANSEN van WYHE (KNICKERBOCKER)

(Compiled by Paul F. Knickerbocker – January, 1988)

In the 1850's, a well intentioned, but unfortunate effort was made by some members of the family to discover the origins of Harmen Jansen Knickerbocker (H.J.K.) in Holland. This resulted in much erroneous information and genealogical confusion, which persist to this day.

Joseph Foster Knickerbocker and his half brother John Hale Knickerbocker lived in the Schaghticoke mansion at this time. Joseph (1824-1882) was an eccentric, never married and spent his life writing poems, essays, and delving into family and local history. Unfortunately, he tended to be careless in checking dates and facts.

John Hale (1829-1858) was a graduate of Union College and died at an early age. He went to Holland in 1855 and, apparently with the aid of genealogist, sought out his ancestors. He was led to believe that H.J.K. was a member of the prominent "van Berghen" family of Friesland and was supplied with an illustrious pedigree going back several centuries. Some careful checking would have shown this to be completely false.

Joseph wrote this up as family history and even insisted that the Coat of Arms that long hung in the parlor at Schaghticoke was a "van Berghen" Coat of Arms. This material received wide publicity in December, 1876 when Gen. Egbert Viele (whose mother was a Knickerbocker) wrote an extensive paper on the Knickerbocker family that was published in *HARPER'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE*. Mr. Edmund Knickerbocker (of the Dutchess County branch) published a chart in 1890 containing the same erroneous material including a drawing of the "van Berghen" coat of arms.

It remained for Kathlyne Knickerbocker Viele (the General's daughter) to demolish the "van Berghen myth" in her *SKETCHES OF ALLIED FAMILIES KNICKERBACKER-VIELE* published in 1916. This is probably the best work on the Knickerbocker family though it concentrates on the Schaghticoke branch. She pointed out correctly that Harmen Jansen's family name had been "van Wyhe" for many generations in Holland. She did not give any specific information on his ancestors though certain things she said indicate that she was knowledgeable on this subject.

Around 1960, while going through some Knickerbocker papers in the State Library in Albany, I came across some hand written genealogical papers that traced H.J.K.'s ancestry back several hundred years. The papers bore no name or date and I first thought this was the "de-bunked" material used by J.F. Knickerbocker. Closer examination showed no similarities in names, dates or places, and I concluded that this was an entirely different piece of work. The information must have been obtained in Holland and whether Kathlyne Viele was aware of it is unknown.

After examining it carefully, I am of the opinion that it is fundamentally correct. Considering that it takes H.J.K.'s ancestry back several hundred years, it is understandable that much of it is sketchy and that there are few specific dates. In fact, if it were more complete I would be suspicious of its accuracy.

Along with this chart was a page of hand drawn and colored Coats of Arms of early branches of the van Wyhe family. I have a good knowledge of Heraldry and am convinced that the Knickerbocker Coat of Arms is, without doubt, a "van Wyhe" Coat of Arms. For what it's worth then and realizing that it can't be 100% proven, here is the basic information from these charts:

**1st Generation:** The first recorded ancestor of Harmen Jansen Knickerbocker, (and therefore ourselves) is Jordaen van Wyhe who took his name from the settlement of "WYHE" on the river "YSSEL" in the central Netherlands province of "OVERYSSEL". (The van Wyhe Coat of Arms is apparently based on the Arms of the province of "OVERYSSEL")

Jordaen was probably born around 1245, for it is stated that in 1271 he married \_\_\_ Echteld. She was apparently an heiress in her own right, as Jordaen became the "1st Lord of Echteld", a minor title of

Dutch nobility passed through the eldest son. This was the beginning of the branch of the family known as "van Wyhe - Tot Echteld" which became extinct in 1753.

**2nd Generation:** Jordaan v.W. (van Wyhe) had three sons, and we are descended from Hendrick, the eldest. All that is known about Hendrick is that he had one son Johannes, one daughter Hermana, and died before his father.

**3rd Generation:** Johannes v.W. (3rd Lord of Echteld) married Hille van Rivierre; had five sons and one daughter and died in 1371. We are descended from his 3rd son, Herman van Wyhe.

**4th Generation:** Herman v.W. married \_\_\_ and had four children. In 1392 he was the Governor of Neder-Betue, a district in the province of North Brabant which includes the town of "BOMMEL" from which H.J.K. left for America many years later. From this time on our branch of the family seems to have been located near "BOMMEL" in North Brabant.

**5th Generation:** We are descended from Herman's son Willem. All that is known is that Willem was alive in 1434 and had three children.

**6th Generation:** Herman v.W. (Willem's son) married \_\_\_ van Heerdt. He was magistrate of the town of ARNEM in 1459 and was alive in 1490. He had two children one being Harmon Harmansz van Wyhe.

**7th Generation:** Harmon Harmonize v.W. married Aleid van Bommel. He becomes "Lord of Ressenbroeck" near Bommel. He had a son Gysbert and died in 1531.

**8th Generation:** Gysbert v.W. married \_\_\_ and had a son Cornelis. Gilbert was a judge at Arnhem and died in 1548. He belonged to the nobility of the "UPPER BETUE".

**9th Generation:** Cornelis v.W. was a judge at Wageningen in 1563. He married Wilhelmina van Haeften and had a son Roelof.

**10th Generation:** Roelof v.W. was a Captain in the army and married Johanna Splythoff. It appears that he died in 1600.

**11th Generation:** Johannes v.W. of Bommel married Jannetje Jansen of Masterlandt.

**12th Generation:** Their son was Harmen Jansen van Wye (he always spelled it this way). He was born about 1648 and probably came to America in 1674. He called himself "van Wyekyback(e)" and that is the name that he signed on a land contract in 1682. He is the ancestor of all "KNICKERBOCKERS" in North America.

**\*\* I have since discovered that Kathlyne Knickerbacker Viele went to Holland sometime after 1913 and researched the van Wyhe family. This work found at Albany is probably hers. Confirmation of this would add to its credibility.**

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# The Great Knickerbocker Train Wreck

I'm always poking through some obscure vital records. While compiling those at Bristol, CT, I found the death certificate<sup>1</sup> of my Gt. Gt. Uncle George. The following story unfolded as a result of that chance discovery. (Howard Knickerbocker, East Hartford, CT - 1997.)

George A. Knickerbocker was born<sup>2</sup> at Salisbury, Litchfield, CT on 22 July 1840, the son of Solomon Knickerbocker and Clarissa Root of that town. He was the fourth of ten children born to the couple. Eight survived to adulthood. Children in order of birth:

Sarah Jane	1835 - 1927
Albert G.	1836 - 1838
Mary Frances	1838 - 1916
George A.	1840 - 1883
Franklin D.	1845 - 1923
John W.	1850 - 1930
Ward W.	1852 - 1925
Clara E.	1855 - 1860
Nettie M.	1858 - 1930
Hattie C.	Not in Salisbury records

The family lived in the Lime Rock district of Salisbury<sup>3</sup> and owned a farm on Rose Hill on the north side of the highway leading from Wolcott farm to Lime Rock. Solomon sold the farm and 10 1/2 acres to his daughter Sarah Jane in 1863. George is living with his parents in 1860 and his occupation is shown as peddler in the census of that year. George married<sup>3</sup> Hattie A. Smith at Winsted, CT on 30 Nov 1861.

George heeded the call to colors and joined<sup>4</sup> Company E of the 28th Connecticut Volunteer Regiment in the War of the Rebellion. The regiment was formed<sup>5</sup> in September 1862 as a 90 day unit composed almost entirely of Litchfield county men. The regiment trained on Long Island and then traveled to New Orleans. This loss of his sons (and their labor) to the Union might have been the reason that Solomon sold the farm at age 50.

The 26th fought in the battle of Vicksburg on 14 June 1863. The 28th suffered 83 deaths during the course of service. The regiment continued to serve in LA, MS and FL. George survived the conflict and were mustered out of service on 28 August 1863.

George went to work on the New York and New England Railroad, as did his all his brothers. This was the heyday of railroading and must have been a very appealing profession for the young men of that era. George worked as a fireman for several years and by 1870 was an engineer on the line.

George and Hattie had one son, George Hiram, born in xxx, MA in 1866. A daughter, Eulah Mabel, was born in Hartford, CT in 1874. Railroad workers moved very often following assignments and changes in responsibility. I have traced my Gt. Grandfather John (George's younger brother) to at least twenty different residences in the 1860 – 90 period. Young son George had married and I'm sure George and Hattie were looking forward to grandchildren and a slower paced middle age.

The family would be changed forever on a hot summer's day in July of 1883. The following tragic story is repeated in its entirety.

[From *The Hartford Courant* – July 11, 1883]

## A RAILROAD FATALITY

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*Frightful Collision on the New England Road at Plainville*

### **A Telegraph Operators Negligence Robs Two People Of Their Lives and Seriously Wounds Another—Engineer Knickerbocker's Terrible Death—The Express Messenger's Injuries.**

The eastward bound passenger train on the New York and England road due at New Britain at 5:16 Monday afternoon, collided with a gravel train about one mile east of Plainville. Both trains were running at a speed of thirty miles an hour. When George Knickerbocker, the engineer of the passenger train, saw the approaching gravel train, he shut off steam and reversed the engine. Before he was able to escape from the cab the collision occurred, and he was thrown against the bank and almost instantly killed. His brother, Ward Knickerbocker, the fireman, was only slightly injured as he jumped from the engine before the collision. Charles W. Church, the messenger for Adams Express Company, who resides with his mother at No. 73 Edwards Street, this city, was in the baggage car and was very badly injured, being thrown some forty feet. Charles Griswold, of Waterbury, aged 17, employed in a restaurant at that place, had obtained a pass to Clayton to view the wreck of the freight train. He was standing near Church, and when the collision occurred was thrown over the telegraph wires into a field, and died almost immediately. Frank Bogt, the engineer of the gravel train, and also the firemen, name unknown, jumped from the engine before the collision, and were unharmed.

Conductor Jacobs was taking tickets in the rear car at the time of the collision, and in common with the passengers, received a severe shaking up. The engines, the baggage car and four gravel cars were completely wrecked. The total loss is estimated at \$8,000.

The accident was caused by the negligence of Charles W. Welch, the operator at Plainville. The passenger train was somewhat late and orders had been sent to the engineer of the gravel train, as well as to Welch, for the trains to pass at Plainville. Welch forgot to give the order to the conductor of the passenger train. He was only 17 years old, and had received orders to go to Bristol for duty last night. He claims that the order so occupied his mind that he for the time being entirely forgot everything else. The order was received by him at 5:08, and the passenger train left at 5:28. Soon after its departure, Welch exclaimed excitedly, "Gosh! That train ought to have stayed here."

Knickerbocker, the engineer, was caught in the wreck of his engine and was terribly mangled, two of the boiler tubes penetrating his abdomen. His body was taken to his late home in Bristol, where he leaves a wife and three (two) children. He had been in the employ of the road for sixteen years. The body of Griswold was delivered to friends in Plainville. At ten o'clock last evening the track was cleared and trains were once more running.

It was reported late last evening that operator Welch had been arrested. A law passed in 1873 provides that any servant of a railroad corporation who causes death of any person on said road by negligence may be punished by imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years. The question has been raised whether Welch was an employee of the railroad company or the Western Union telegraph company. At the office of the railroad in this city it was stated that he was an employee of that company.

Superintendent Holbrook, of the New York and New England road, stated that Welsh had been in the employ of the company about five years, that he was regarded as one of the most competent and reliable

operators on the road, and that he could assign no reason whatever for his forgetfulness on the present occasion.

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Young Church, the express messenger, had been employed on the road but a few weeks. He ran from Rockville to Bristol, going east in the morning then running out to Bristol in the afternoon. He was in the tunnel accident a week ago last Saturday, and was badly shaken up by the collision. His mother and brother went to New Britain last evening and came in with him on the train reaching Hartford at about 11 o'clock. His injuries are a bad cut on the forehead extending to the mouth, and severe internal injuries. He bore the trip in from Plainville with noticeable fortitude, and was carried from the depot to his home at 73 Edwards street on a stretcher. A physician said that Church's injuries were not necessarily fatal, and that there was a good chance of his recovery. He is but 17 years of age, and is the son of the late C. W. Church, who was a well-known real estate dealer in this city.

Knickerbocker was one of the best known engineers running through Hartford, and the employees of the road all spoke in the warmest terms of him last evening, and lamented his sad end.

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### **Statement of an Eyewitness.**

Dr. Henry C. Bullock of this city, who was in the rear car of the passenger train, made the following statement. "We left Plainville at about twenty minutes past five and were soon running pretty rapidly. When about one mile east of the place I heard two sharp whistles followed in a few seconds by a terrible crash. There were just a few persons in the car, and we were all thrown violently forward, sustaining a severe shock. I looked out of the window and saw a man hurled through the air. I got out and walked over to the lot where I found one man dead and another apparently dying. I walked back to Plainville, hired a man to drive me to New Britain and came to Hartford via Berlin.

### **The Operator's Disappearance-Condition of Young Church-Clearing the Wreck- Another Fatal Accident.**

A remarkable feature of the numerous accidents which have occurred on the New York and New England railroad, and which has been frequently commented upon, is the escape of passengers from serious injury. Monday's disaster at Plainville did not number among the victims any passengers who were in the passenger cars, and young Griswold might be now living had he been seated in one of those cars. He had a pass over the line from Hartford to Waterbury to enable him to distribute restaurant circulars through the trains, and therefore could hardly be called a transient passenger.

Welch, the operator, could not be found in Plainville Tuesday, and he has probably fled to avoid arrest. His parents reside in Southington. Coroner Sperry Tuesday visited the scene of the disaster, and conversed with several who witnessed the collision. The time for holding the inquest has not been decided upon.

Clarence W. Church, the express messenger, is under the care of Dr. Steven, and no unfavorable symptoms have appeared in his case up to Tuesday evening. He had a severe gash in his forehead and his right hand and left leg are badly cut. In addition to these injuries he was badly scalded by the escaping steam from the boiler. This was the third railroad accident to which he had been a victim, but his injuries on former occasions were very slight.

The wrecked locomotives were brought to this city Tuesday morning and were the objects of great interest throughout the day. It appears that when the collision occurred, the baggage car was forced over the tender, and, falling upon the dome, caused it to explode, thus freeing all the steam in the boiler.

### **A DEAF MUTE KILLED**

Howard Hull, deaf and dumb, aged 18 years visited the place where the accident occurred near Plainville, Tuesday afternoon, and while walking on the New England tracks on his return to his home in

Plainville, was struck by the passenger train which left New Britain at 4:15 o'clock and instantly killed. The body was taken to Plainville where his parents reside. [End]

An Obituary from: *The Bristol Press* - July 12, 1883

## Engineer Knickerbocker

Engineer George A. Knickerbocker, who was killed in the railroad accident at Plainville on Monday, has been a resident of Bristol about two years, occupying the Episcopal rectory. He had been an engineer twelve years, having previously served as fireman several years. He was a man of good principles and stood high in the opinion of those who knew him. As an engineer he ranked among the best on the road. His untimely death, at the age of 43, is a great blow to his family, and is much lamented in the community, and among his associates on the road. His funeral was held at the Episcopal Church at half past eleven today. Rev. Mr. Nichols, of Hartford, officiating. Several of his associate employees were present. After the funeral services the two children of the deceased and his son's wife were baptized. The remains were taken to Hartford on the half past one train and buried in Spring Grove Cemetery. Mr. Knickerbocker resided in Hartford before coming to Bristol. He leaves a wife and two children, a married son and a daughter of nine years. His father and two brothers also reside here. The former is gateman at the Main street crossing, and came near losing his life last winter by being struck by a locomotive. [End]

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George's family received a small compensation from the railroad of \$650. By 1885 Hattie was selling property to survive as evidenced by a mortgage deed<sup>10</sup> for the sale of a piano for \$300 to Mary Mills of Salisbury. Hattie remarried a John A. Richmond and hopefully things would turn better for George's family. This was not to be.

Son George was going through a series of commitments<sup>11</sup> to the State Mental Hospital at Middletown, CT. The first was in 1889 and the final one being 9 Feb 1894 as a pauper from East Hartford. The Psychiatric diagnosis was not stated, but one can imagine the toll taken from the tragic loss of his father. George would die at the Mental Hospital in 1941. His marital state was given as divorced on the death certificate. It is not known at this point who his wife was or if they had any children.

George's daughter, Eulah Mabel, died<sup>12</sup> on 9 Aug 1891 at age 16 years and nine months from Peritonitis and heart failure. The family was living on Linden St. in East Hartford at the time of her death. Dr. W. R. Sedgewick was attending physician and was the same one to sign the commitment papers for George. She received final communion<sup>13</sup> at the First Congregational Church at East Hartford on xxx xxx, 1891. Burial was at Spring Grove cemetery at Hartford, CT with her father.

Hattie E. (Smith-Knickerbocker) Richmond died on 28 Feb 1898. She was also interred with George at Spring Grove, bringing to a close this tragic Knickerbocker story. My partner and I made a trip to Spring Grove on 25 Jul 1992. The cemetery was a show place in Victorian times but is now, a hundred years later, surrounded by drug infested slums in the north end of Hartford. The only entrance was on North Main Street through the driveway of a Baptist church. The very large cemetery was in terrible shape due to vandals and neglect and we actually feared for our well being.

We were very fortunate to spot the monument as we drove through. It is located between the northern most east/west road and north fence, about 500 feet from the eastern end of the cemetery. A well used footpath and hole through the fence is just west of the plot. The magnificent monument had extensive damage with a table like top almost completely knocked off. Like so many of the marble stones, the inscriptions are disappearing due to the acid rain.

The following inscriptions were noted:

George A. Knickerbocker

**Born July 22, 1840**  
**Died July 9, 1883**  
**Co. E. 28<sup>th</sup> Reg C V**  
**God Shall Wipe Away The Tears**

**Hattie E. Smith**  
**Wife of**  
**John A. Richmond**  
**Died Feb 28, 1898**  
**AE 52**

**Eulah M.**  
**Daughter of George**  
**Died Aug 9, 1891**  
**16 years 9 months**  
**(Two foot stones marked "HUSBAND" and "WIFE" were present.)**

**Bibliography:**

- 1) **Bristol, CT vital records.**
- 2) **Salisbury, CT vital records.**
- 3) **Salisbury, CT land records. Land volume 27, page 501**
- 4) **1860 Federal census, Litchfield Co., CT.**
- 5) **Winsted, CT vital records, page 42**
- 6) **Hale collection of early vital records. CT State Library, Hartford, CT.**
- 7) **History of Connecticut in the War of the Rebellion, CT State Library, Hartford, CT.**
- 8) **MA index to vital records**
- 9) **Hartford, CT vital records.**
- 10) **Microfilm archives of the Hartford Courant. CT State Historical Society, Hartford, CT.**
- 11) **Microfilm archives of The Bristol Press. Bristol Public Library, Bristol, CT.**
- 12) **Bristol, CT land records. Book 40, page 278.**
- 13) **Hartford, CT vital records.**
- 14) **East Hartford, CT probate Court records dated 19 Jan 1889, 30 Jun 1891 & 9 Feb 1894. Pages 338, 344 & 347.**
- 15) **Middletown, CT vital records.**
- 16) **East Hartford, CT vital records. Volume C, page 378.**
- 17) **Hale Collection of CT Church records. CT State Library, Hartford, CT.**
- 18) **Headstone inscription. Spring Grove Cemetery, North Main St., Hartford, CT.**