

This letter was written by Dr. William Van Alstyne to Ms. Kathryn Knickerbocker Viele on December 6, 1914. It followed three or four letters from Dr. Van Alstyne to Ms. Viele about the source of the family name Knickerbocker. I found it useful for two reasons: the list below is similar to the one in Ms. Viele's book it is fairly typical of the nature of their correspondence. As you will notice, neither is an individual of weak opinions.

Dear Ms. Viele,

For a long time I have intended to give you my opinion of the origin of the name Knickerbocker, but have hesitated owing to my meager knowledge of modern and old Dutch. Grouping the earliest occurrences of the ancestor's name we note the following:

1680 March 2, Herman Jansen Van Bommel – Appoints Attorney  
1682 Dec. 11, Harman Jensen Van Uye (w like u) – Van Schayck Deed  
1683 (or prior thereto), Harman Jenssz Knickelbacker – Church Member Albany  
1684 May 6, Harman Jansen Kinnikerabacker - Court Minutes 1680-85:531  
1684 June 3, Harman Jansen Van Bommel – Court Minutes; Supra 5 Jury Trial  
1686 Jan. 1, Harme Jansz Van Bommel – Lauren's Bap. At Albany  
1688 Sept. 2, Harmen Jansz, Cornelis's Bap. - At Albany  
1692 Jan. 6, Harmen Jansz (Lysbet Jansz) – Cornelis Bap. At Albany  
1695 Jul. 21, Harmen Knikkelbacker (Lysbetts Bogart) – Cornelia's Bap. Albany  
1996/7 Feb. 26, Harmen Knicklebacker – Bks 4:94 – Deed from Van Schayck  
1698 Mar. 9, Harme Janse (Lysbet Bogart) – Sponsors at Albany  
1699 Sep. 3, Harmen Jansse (Lysbet Bogart) – Evarts Bap. At Albany  
1702 Apr. 19, Harmen Knikkelbakker (Lysbetts Bogart) – Pieter Bap at Albany  
1707 ....., Herman Jansen Kynckbacker – Will

You will be able to revise, amplify and extend this list. Knikkelbacker seems to be a favorite form, after 1700, in the Albany Church records. Was the 'l' a peculiarly shaped 'r'? Thus far we have only found one true signature., that of 1682. It is possible that other signatures may be found, namely of those of 1680 (have you documentary reference May 6, 1684, June 3 1684 and the unverified (on my part) reference of March 15 1706/7, Bks 6:39. Glancing through this list we note Jansz (James) occurs three times, all in the Albany Church Records, 'Van Wie' (w like u) only once and Van Bommel(l) four times; the only original signature (1682) is Harmen Jansen Van WyeKckbaber and 1707 a copied signature, Herman Jansen Kynckbacker. It is questionable in some of the spellings whether the letter is 'u' or 'w,' possibly this is so in the transferred signature of 1707; furthermore the ancestor was illiterate. Kyck is suggestive of Kuik or Cuyk, a place in North Brabant not far east of Bommel. A man coming from a small town near a large city would be likely to call himself from the large city for distinctive purposes. For instance, our relatives in Columbia County, New York, always speak of us as from New York whereas in reality we are twenty – four miles from that city. Kyckbaker might mean the baker from Kuik. There is an old family in Holland called variously Cuijk, Kuyeman, van Kuyck and van Cuijk. In 1464 there was a Jacob Zegerszoon van Kuyck, 'schepen' of Hersden, his son Zeger Jacobs the same in 1509, his son William Jacobs the same in 1514 and his son Cornelis, 'schepen' of 's – Hertogenbosch in 1638. Also in 1428 there was a Jan Willemszen Kuyck, 'schepen' of Hersden, 'Dirk Kuyck van de Wiel.' The same in 1476, Hendricks the same in 1490,

Ivain in 1491 and Matthijs Kuijk in 1524, 'scheferen' van's Hertogenbosch. Note that Dirk Kuijk calls himself 'van de Wiel' which suggests 'van Wie' in the signature of 1682. The Question arises if Knickerbocker is derived from Kuijkbakker or Kuikbaker, why the change to the present form. We know that such changes took place I gave as an example Van Couvenhaven which is now Conover. I do not lay stress on the name 'van wje (w like u)' as it occurs only once, but it is important in that it is found in the ancestor's signature. The ancestor's name appears as Van Bommel more often and there was an old family in Holland by the name of Van Bommel which I have not investigated. Harmen Jansen Knickerbocker may have lived in either or both Wyhe or Bommel or his family may have originated there in the past. Among the Dutch Archives we find at least two valuable items: May 14, 1649, Dirk Cornelisz Koekkebakker appears as one of the barons at Delft, also in a different list of names in 1684 and 1685, Nikloss Koekebakker appears together with others of the name Van Kuijk and de Ridder. My researches along this line have been so brief that for present I cannot give further details. The names Koekkebakker and Koekabakker are almost identical with Kycbaker of 1682, the last the signature of an illiterate name. Basing my conclusions on these three names, I believe the name Knickerbocker is derived from the Dutch word 'Koek' (?) meaning cake and Bakker, a bakker of cakes. Later the descendants on this side of the ocean changed the name to the more euphous form of Knickerbocker which is really marble baker (from 'Knikker,' a marble and 'bakker,' a baker). The meaning lame-baker (bent or crooked baker) is not satisfactory to me and again after a hundred years one cannot depend upon family tradition. My final opinion is therefore, that the original name meant cake – baker but became changed so as to mean 'marble baker.'

In regard to Jean (Jan) Fort, in 1687 he is called Libarte' an din 1696 Labther, in 1683 Fort alias Liberte, in 1685 Liberte, in 1703 ffort, alias Libertee, in 1708 Margret ye wife of Jan Fort Liberte', in 1713 Margaret widow of Jan Fort alias Libertee. I doubt very much if you will find any other references to Liberte. I am not at all sure that Liberte' would be the Dutch way of writing LaPetit. Fort was no doubt his family name, Liberte, the free man, his nick name.

My ancestor was frequently called 'de Wever' or the weaver, yet there is no record of his weaving in this county. He evidently gained the nickname before he came to this county. I am inclined to believe that the name Knickerbocker was a family name before Herman Jansen began to use it.

Did you hear from the Walloon pamphlet?

Very Cordially  
William V. Van Alstyne