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# New Netherland Connections

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**Albert Gysbertsen and Aeltje Wiggers:  
Progenitors of the Van Gorden/Van Gorder Family in America  
by Mary E. Van Gorden**

*Considerable work has been done during the past century by family historians researching the surname Van Gorden and its variations (Van Gordon/Van Garden/Van Gorder, etc.). I have corresponded with many of these researchers over the years and have read the findings of others in the published literature. I am particularly indebted to Van Gorden researcher, Fred Schaen of Brooklyn, New York, for his careful review of this essay, for his contribution of important details, and for his assistance in making certain that the material is as accurate as possible.*

To date only a small amount of verified information has been found concerning the origins of the Van Gorden family, and even some of that has come from questionable sources. We can be quite certain, however, that the progenitors of most, if not all, of the various Van Gorden families in the United States were the Dutch couple Albert Gysbertsen (Gysbertse/Gijsbertsen) and Aeltje Wiggers (Wygerts/Wichgers).

In the April 1898 issue of *Church Life*, a publication of the Reformed Dutch Church of Deerpark, Port Jervis, New York, we find the following regarding the Van Gorden family:

The Van Gordens or Van Gardens, as the name was originally given, were among the earliest settlers of Ulster County, N.Y., and several of the families came to the Menissink region as early as 1720 or thereabouts. At one time they were very numerous, and occupied farms on both sides of the Delaware river from just below Port Jervis to the townships of Walpeck in New Jersey and Lehman in Pennsylvania.

The emigrant ancestor of all the van Gordens, of whom we have any account of, was Albert Gysbersen. His wife was Aeltje Wiggers, of Heerde, [in the] province of Gelderland, in Holland.

In an effort to learn more about this couple from primary sources, I sought help from Dutch genealogist Peter Nouwt, who conducted research in the Netherlands on my behalf. His valuable findings have been incorporated here.

Albert and Aeltje did not use surnames, since fixed family names were not required in the Netherlands until 1811 or in New Netherland until after the English took over in 1664. Early Dutch settlers in America used the patronymic naming system (identification by the father's first name) almost exclusively. Thus we know that Albert was a son of Gysbert (Gilbert), and Aeltje (Alice) was a daughter of Wigger (or some form of that name).

It is important to know that early Dutch women often did not change their names when marrying. Kenn Stryker-Rodda has written that "the Dutch, in what the English thought to be a muddle-headed way, considered a woman as a human being rather than a chattel, endowed at birth with a name she did not automatically sacrifice on marriage."

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The belief that Albert Gysbertsen came from the Netherlands province of Gelderland has been substantiated. Because his son, Gysbert Albertsen, began using the surname Van Garden as early as 1684, various researchers have theorized that Albert came from the Gelderland village of Garderen. However, Peter Nouwt found no trace of Albert or his family at Garderen. (Unfortunately, church records in that community date back to only 1699.) Mr. Nouwt also points out that "*Garderen* is not the same as *Garden*."

Mr. Nouwt has hypothesized that perhaps "Gysbert Albertsen intended to use the family name VAN GERDEN as referring to the village of HEERDE. After all, his parents were called Aelbert Gijssbertsen VAN HEERDE (1657) and Aeltje Wiggers OF HERDEN (1665)." Pronunciation differences between the English and Dutch languages could have accounted for the spelling variations.

Peter Nouwt believes that both Albert and Aeltje came from the Gelderland village of Heerde or its immediate area. Heerde is located about 15 miles north of Appeldoorn. In the Kingston, New York, church record of Aeltje's 1665 marriage to her third husband, Pieter Hillebrants, she is shown as "Aeltje Wiggers, of Herden [Heerde], in Gelderlant [Gelderland], widow of Albert Gysbersen." On the same page of that register there is a listing for the 1664 marriage of Aeltje's daughter, Aeltjen Lubbers, who is recorded as being from Elburgh[Elburg], a village only 10 miles from Heerde.

Of great value is the following information found by Mr. Nouwt in the Gelderland archives concerning a 1650 court case in which Aeltje Wiggers was involved:

According to court records of the Hof van Gelderland (provincial Court of Gelderland) in 1650, legal action was taken by Jenneken Jacobs against Cornelis Jacobs, a former resident of the village of Heerde, who has begotten a child by her and who hasn't kept his promise to marry her. On 21 October 1650, Aeltken Wichgers, being about 28 years of age, testified that Cornelis Jacobs had come to her house on several occasions to see Jenneken Jacobs and that he had promised to marry her.

From this record we learn that Aeltje was born in about 1622 and that she lived at, or near, Heerde. Since Heerde church records date back to only 1658, baptismal information for Albert and Aeltje could not be located there. However, Mr. Nouwt did find in the tax registers references to a Wycher Henricksen and a Wycher Gijssbertsen "both living in the hamlet of Hoom, within the parish of Heerde. One of them might have been Aeltje Wiggers' father."

No evidence of Albert's birth date has been found, but Wilson Ledley has estimated the birth year to have been about 1620, a speculation which seems reasonable to me. Aeltje's first husband was Lubbert Jansen, with whom she had two children, Aeltjen Lubberts and Jan Lubbertsen. However, it is possible Aeltje was already married to Albert Gysbertsen at the time of the court case described above. Mr. Nouwt has written, "It seems plausible that she married Lubbert Jansen in 1640-45 and Albert Gijssbertsen in 1645-55, and I think that together they crossed the ocean in 1650-56 in the company of other people from Heerde."

In the records at Heerde, Mr. Nouwt discovered brothers Gerrit Gijssbertsen and Aert Gijssbertsen, who he believes may have been brothers of Albert Gijssbertsen. Gerrit Gijssbertsen also emigrated to New Netherland, locating by 1658 at Fort Orange (now Albany) as a servant of the carpenter Claes Hendriks van Schoonhoven. Albert Gysbertsen, who was also at Fort Orange in 1658, was a wheelwright.

The parents of Gerrit and Aert Gijssbertsen were Gijssbert Ariensen and Kerstgen Everts, who, thus, might also have been the parents of Albert. Considerable information can be found in the old Heerde-area records concerning this family's land transactions and some of their later church baptisms.

On 20 October 1631 Gijssbert Ariensen, as husband and guardian of Kerstgen Everts, requested the renewal of the tenure for six years of a serf-estate in the hamlet of Assendorp and the jurisdiction of

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Heerde, since the existing tenure was due to expire on 31 October 1631. (Mr. Nouwt has explained that "in the 17th century many feudal estates...were owned by the government of Gelderland. They were held in hereditary tenure by the occupant of the estate. In most cases his eldest son would inherit the tenure. Every six years the tenant of a serf-estate had to renew his tenure.")

Gijsbert Ariensen died sometime between 1631 and 1635, and Kerstgen Everts then married Jan Henricksen. Kerstgen died about 1665, and her son, Aert Gijsbertsen, then took over her land.

An important clue concerning when Albert and Aeltje emigrated to New Netherland can be found in a list of settlers on Staten Island, New York, who survived the Indian massacre of September 1655. The following excerpt from that record is believed to refer to Albert's family:

Aelbert Gyssebertsen van Heerde met syn vrou, ende vier kinder, ende een knecht hout sich int'fort Orangen. (Albert Gysbertsen of Heerde with his wife and four children and one man servant, dwelling at Fort Orange.)

Dorothy A. Koenig provided Peter Nouwt with enlightening information from another portion of this document found on page 74 of Volume 13 of *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of New York*:

A closer look [at this document] shows that its full heading is *List of the farmers, men, women, children, male and female servants sent by Yoncker Henrick van der Capellen toe Ryssel to Staten-Island in New-Netherland in West-India [America] since May 1650 and of those who were alive after the dreadful and bloody massacre by the savages in September 1655.* [Due to the ineptness of New Amsterdam officials following the stealing of peaches by an Indian squaw, hundreds of Indians rose up in September 1655 and killed many settlers on Staten Island and the New Jersey shore in what became known as the *Peach War*.] The list of settlers was reported by the wife of Captain Adriaen Post and farmer Jan Aerentsen van Heerde on 14 November 1657 [at Zutphen, Gelderland, the Netherlands].

The Jan Aerentsen who was involved in the report at Zutphen was on the list of settlers, himself, having emigrated with his wife and eight children from Heerde.

From information in the above document, we can surmise that Albert Gysbertsen and Aeltje Wiggers came to America from Heerde after October 1650 and prior to September 1655; that they had at least two children when they arrived; that they were on Staten Island during the Indian raids of September 1655; and that they were living at Fort Orange not long after the raids.

In leaving the Netherlands, Albert and Aeltje were part of an historic migration of colonists to New Netherland which began in 1624. They apparently were sent by a Dutch nobleman (*jonker*) needing settlers on his Staten Island land. Their subsequent removal to Fort Orange/Beverwyck was undoubtedly an effort to escape Indian problems occurring at the lower end of the Hudson River. (The village surrounding Fort Orange became known as Beverwyck in 1652 and later, a composite of the two was called Albany.)

A few traces of Albert and Aeltje's life at Fort Orange/Beverwyck can be found in official records. Recently translated deacons' accounts from the Dutch Reformed Church at Beverwyck show that on 22 May and 1 July 1656, "Albert Gisbertsen *de Ramaker*" (the wheelwright) was advanced a small amount of money by the church deacons, possibly as a loan.

In the *Fort Orange Court Minutes* we learn that on 5 December 1656, Albert made application for a garden lot, identifying himself as a wheelwright. (A wheelwright made or repaired wheels and wheeled vehicles.) In those same minutes, Albert *de Rademaker* complained to the court that Jacobsen Bambus owed him "20 beavers and f150: in sewant [or wampun, beads made from shells and used as an

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exchange medium]" and that Bambus was hiding in the Esopus and should be brought back to Fort Orange.

Two later court records show Albert Gysbertsen defending himself against persons to whom he was supposedly in debt. In one case, Albert was accused of owing "the balance of 113 *schepels* of wheat, according to a contract which they had with each other at the rate of 3 *schepels* of wheat for one beaver, of which 75 *schepels* have been paid for, so that there is still due the plaintiff 38 *schepels* of wheat." (The Dutch also used their wheat as an exchange medium, measuring it in *schepels*, one *schepel* being 76.4% of a bushel.)

Another interesting record reveals that in 1658-1660 Albert was in court several times as plaintiff against Maria Goosens, defendant. "The plaintiff demands reparation of character because the defendant called the plaintiff a thief. The defendant denies that she said it, as far as she knows, but on the contrary alleges that the plaintiff called her a whore, a pig, and a church thief." These judicial encounters are evidence of the many squabbles which developed among and between those early settlers and of their affinity for using the court system.

One of the last Fort Orange records concerning Albert involves *A Bond of Albert Gysbertsen to Wynant Gerritsen* in which Albert, living in Beverwyck, acknowledges that he owes Gerritsen "80 skipples of good winter wheat growing out of the purchase and delivery of a young gelding horse..." and in which a payment schedule is agreed upon. Albert signed this agreement on 4 February 1661, using the letter "A."

It appears that Albert moved his family down the Hudson River in 1661, to the region known as Esopus and to the community of Wiltwyck (which became Kingston in 1669). The Wiltwyck area provided opportunities for land ownership, which had not been possible at the patroonship Rensselaerswyck adjacent to Beverwyck.

In 1661, there were 45 dwellings at Wiltwyck; Albert Gysbertsen's house lot was #27. That same year residents, including Albert, were taxed for funds to build a house for the minister, Dominie Blom. That dwelling also was used as a church for several years. Wiltwyck church records tell us that Albert and Aeltje transferred their church membership from Beverwyck to Wiltwyck on 15 April 1661. While at Beverwyck they attended the Dutch Reformed Church, which had been established in 1642 and which was the center of life in the community. Baptismal and marriage records for that old church are no longer in existence for the years Albert and Aeltje were members.

A few paragraphs concerning the Beverwyck church seem appropriate here. The following information comes from Dr. Robert Alexander, church historian:

In 1647, the congregation was meeting in a remodeled storehouse near the Fort, close to the river at what is still called "Church Street." However, on June 2, 1656, the cornerstone was laid for a new blockhouse church at the present intersection of State Street and Broadway.

The new church was made of heavy wooden timbers, with cannon mounted behind loopholes in the balconies. The women sat on the ground floor, while the men occupied the balconies, where they could man the cannon if necessary.

Eventually, church officials ordered from Amsterdam, in The Fatherland, "a finely carved pulpit of Flemish oak..." which cost 25 beaver pelts. It arrived in 1657 and was first used in the blockhouse church. It had an hourglass, which most often was turned at least once during the sermon. (Imagine a 2 or 3-hour service during the winter months in that unheated church! The only warmth available was from charcoal foot warmers brought by the worshippers.)

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The oak pulpit was moved to a new stone church in 1715 and then to the present church, which was dedicated on January 27, 1799.

Today this historic house of worship is known as First Church in Albany. It is located in downtown Albany at 110 North Pearl Street. The old hourglass pulpit is still a focal point of the chancel, just as it was when Albert and Aeltje were members of the congregation in the middle 1600s.

Not long after Albert Gysbertsen arrived in Wiltwyck, he became deeply involved in civic activities. In James Elston's writings we find the following (taken from Kingston court records):

In May 1662 Albert Gysbertse was nominated by the citizens to be one of the *schepens* [magistrates], and he was personally selected by Stuyvesant. He was also elected for 1663 and served until May 1664, and the first 159 pages of the Court proceedings show that he was present at practically every hearing during the two years and participated in the councils and administrations of affairs. He was deacon in 1661 and 1663. On March 31, 1664, he was one of the signers (by his mark) of the credentials of the two delegates to the General Assembly. This was the first popular election in New Netherland.

Elston also tells us that in Volume XI of the *New York Historical Association Proceedings* Albert's name appears a number of times in the index in regard to "law suits, etc.; elected Commissary, sits as Commissary, deacon, administrator of estates of decedents killed by the Indians, inventor, curator and agreement to pay share of two others for the minister's salary."

Most often Albert was sitting in judgment on others, but several times he appeared in court, himself, as a defendant (e.g., when he was accused of not paying 4-1/2 *schepels* of oats in wages due another man) or as plaintiff (e.g., when he demanded of another person 3 beavers in wages for having made that person a plough).

The Esopus region had serious Indian problems for a number of years. In 1658 Governor Peter Stuyvesant and 60 soldiers marched from New Amsterdam to the settlers' village (later Wiltwyck) to build a stockade, which helped create peace for a few years. However, tensions again developed which were intensified when the settlers shared their alcohol with their Indian neighbors. "This began to cause much arguing and eventually in 1663 caused the second war with the Esopus Indians." An account of that war can be found in Philippe Wiltsee's book, including the following paragraphs:

In the forenoon of Thursday, June 7, 1663, between the hours of eleven and twelve o'clock, Indians entered the village through all the gates, and scattered around, offering to sell beans and maize, in a friendly manner, though acting as spies to learn the number of men in the village.

In about a quarter of an hour people on horseback rushed through the Mill Gate from the new village [nearby Hurley] crying out: "The Indians have destroyed the New Village."

The Indians immediately fired a gun and made a general attack on the rear of the village, murdering the people in their houses with tomahawks and axes, and shooting them with pistols and guns. Whatever women and children they could catch they took outside the gates as prisoners. They plundered the houses and set them on fire...The murderers did their first work so silently and rapidly that those in other parts of the village were not aware of it until the wounded met and warned the others. Albert Gysbertsen was near the Mill Gate with two servants...

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Albert Gysbertsen, who was in the militia, survived the attack; however, 15 men, 4 women, and 2 children were killed; and 30 children and 12 women were carried off as captives. (Another reference says 66 were captives.) In addition at least a dozen homes were burned.

Court records show that Albert Gysbertsen was appointed on 18 September 1663, to serve as an administrator for the estates of three persons killed in the June 7th war who had no living relatives.

Albert died in 1664, after New Netherland was taken over by the English. His death came between October 7th, when he purchased a heifer at an estate auction in Wiltwyck, and December 18th, when Aeltje appeared in court as his widow concerning the heifer.

In those days, Dutch law required that following the death of both parents, or the remarriage of a remaining parent, guardians were appointed to assure that the children were taken care of and that they received their rightful inheritance. Not long after Albert's death, Roeloff Swartwout and Jan Willemsen were appointed guardians of Albert and Aeltje's children -- Lysbet Alberts and Gysbert Albertsen.

On 20 March 1665, "Aeltje Wygerts, widow of Albert Gysbertsen," and Pieter Hillebrants appeared in court (accompanied by Aeltje's son-in-law, Roeloff Hendericks, and Pieter's mother, Femmetje Alberts) to state their marriage intentions and the following pre-nuptial agreement:

1. The marriage to be concluded in accordance with the canons of the reformed religion.
2. All the property, belonging to either party, to be used in common, in accordance with the custom of Holland, with the exception that the bride sets apart for each of her children 50 gilders heavy money, viz. for Aeltje and Jan, children of Lubbert Jansen, and for Lysbet and Gysbert, children of Albert Gysbertsen -- Roeloff Swartwout and Jan Willemsen Hoochtheylingh to be appointed guardians over said children, who are to be instructed in reading, writing, and, if possible, learn a trade. In case of death of either party, the property to be divided.

Aeltje married Pieter, her third husband, two weeks later, on 3 April 1665, at Kingston. She appeared in court there with Pieter, as his wife, the next year on November 9th. We then lose track of Aeltje, except for her appearances at two baptisms in Kingston: In 1675 she was a witness at the baptism of Jeremy, son of Jerremia Kettel and Catharina Guderis; and on 1 November 1684, she was a witness at the baptism of her grandson Pieter, son of "Gysbert Albertz and Rachel Rosecrans." I assume Aeltje died in Kingston or the surrounding area, but the year of her death is unknown.

Aeltje Wiggers' daughter from her first marriage, Aeltjen Lubbers, married Roeloff Hendricksen (Hendericks) at Wiltwyck on 30 November 1664. Aeltjen and Roeloff had several children baptized at the Wiltwyck/Kingston church who took the name In t' Veld. Aeltjen's brother was Jan Lubbertsen who served as a witness at the baptism of two of Hilletje In t' Veld's children at Kingston on 25 June 1699.

Little is known about Aeltje Wiggers' and Albert Gysbertsen's daughter Lysbet, other than that she received at least part of her inheritance on 8 March 1675. Her brother, Gysbert Albertsen, grew to adulthood, married Rachel Rosenkrans and became the father of Hendrick Van Garden, husband of Elenora Dekker.

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