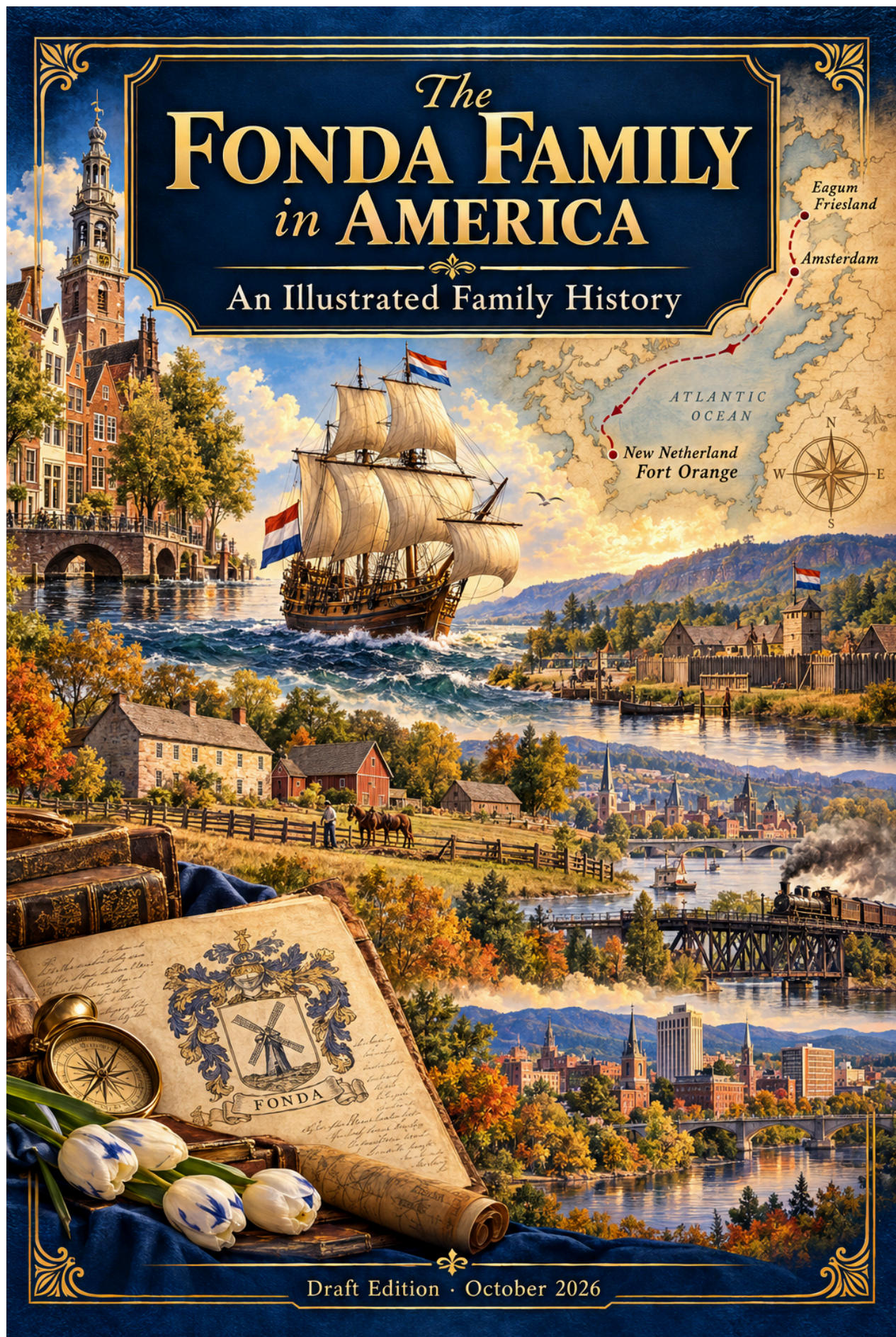




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Introduction

The Fonda family story in America begins with a small body of seventeenth-century records and widens across a remarkably varied landscape. A household associated with Friesland and Amsterdam appears in the upper Hudson region of New Netherland by 1651. Its descendants lived along the Mohawk, survived war and displacement, crossed inland waterways and prairies, and pursued occupations ranging from farming and commerce to public office, science, military service, education, and the arts. This book follows those documented lives while recognizing that no single branch—or occupation—can stand for the whole family.

Why this book

The Fonda family archive was assembled over many years through genealogical research, family contributions, historical publications, public records, and the compiler's own writing. Its online resources make documents, biographies, timelines, and longer narratives accessible to researchers. This book has a different but complementary purpose: to arrange selected evidence into a readable chronological account of the Dutch-American Fonda line and the communities in which its members lived.

It is not an exhaustive family tree or a catalogue of everyone who bore the surname. The emphasis is on significant transitions and recognizable lives: immigration, settlement, war, migration, occupations, and changes from one generation to the next. Readers wishing to trace an individual relationship or locate a particular record should consult the fuller genealogical archive and the sources cited in the chapters.

A family history within a larger American experience

The early chapters follow Jelle (also recorded as Jellis or Gillis) Douwes and Hester Jans, their family in the Netherlands, and their appearance in the upper Hudson region. The narrative then traces selected descendants of their Dutch-American family line through the Mohawk Valley and into other regions of the United States. Separate families who share the Fonda surname are not included merely because their surname matches; a documented genealogical connection matters more than a familiar spelling.

Even within one lineage, people made different choices. Some remained close to the older settlements; others moved far away. Some served in opposing political or military causes, while still others worked in homes, farms, shops, laboratories, schools, churches, and hospitals. The chapters seek to make that variety visible rather than present the family as a single actor moving in lockstep through American history. In that respect, the family's experience also reflects the wider history of successive European migrations and settlement in America—though opportunities for newcomers were accompanied by unequal claims to land and serious consequences for Indigenous communities.

What the records can—and cannot—tell us

Marriage banns, baptisms, church registers, land papers, court minutes, military records, censuses, newspapers, and family correspondence each preserve a different kind of evidence. A contemporary record may establish a date, name, or transaction without explaining the people's motives. A later memoir or local history may supply an engaging story, but memories and retrospective accounts require more caution about wording, sequence, and detail.

Throughout this book, directly documented facts are distinguished, as far as practicable, from later family traditions and historical interpretation. Some long-repeated claims remain unproven. Most notably, repeated attempts to identify Jelle's parents have not produced verified evidence that settles the question. Neither an appealing pedigree nor a proposed DNA connection should be treated as proof of a specific parental relationship. Chapter 1 addresses this problem more fully; the Fonda Blog essays "Common Misconceptions" and "Fonda DNA and History" explain why it remains open.

This distinction is not a weakness in the family story. Being clear about what is known, what is probable, and what has not been demonstrated is part of preserving the record responsibly.

Names, patronymics, and identifying conventions

Early Dutch records often used patronymics—names based on a parent's given name—in ways that differ from modern fixed middle-name conventions. Spelling also varied between clerks, languages, and generations. Jelle Douwes, for example, appears in later English-language family histories under forms such as Jellis Douwse Fonda; these forms should be read in their historical context.

To help distinguish numerous individuals with similar names, especially before 1900, the compiler has sometimes supplied an identifying middle name where a contemporary middle name is not established. The usual convention has been to use the father's given name for men and the mother's maiden surname for women. This is an established working convention throughout the archive, intended to make individuals easier to distinguish, not a claim that every such middle name appears in a birth, baptismal, or other original record. For readability, the book generally follows the archive's identifying names without attempting to label each instance separately.

The surname and its variations

Readers will encounter spellings such as Fonda, Fonde, Fonday, and Fondy, among others. Before standardized spelling, a name might be written as a clerk heard it, altered when a family moved, or stabilized differently in separate branches. A later fixed variant can become the enduring surname of descendants. These possibilities are useful clues for research, but a shared or similar spelling alone does not prove that two families descend from the same immigrant household.

The fuller archive includes surname counts and distribution research. Here the variations are noted chiefly so that readers do not mistake a change in spelling for a certain change—or continuity—in ancestry.

Vignettes and illustrations

Brief titled vignettes appear throughout the chapters. Set apart with gold dividers, an italic typeface, and narrower text measure, they bring a single episode into closer focus. Their literary presentation does not give permission to invent conversations or motives. Where an anecdote survives only in a later retelling, that limitation is acknowledged.

The illustrations combine genuine historical maps and documentary reproductions with newly created color interpretations. Historical documents are identified by their sources; interpretive illustrations are not presented as photographs, portraits taken from life, or exact architectural reconstructions. Their purpose is to help readers imagine the period while leaving the evidentiary record in its proper place. A visual scene should never be mistaken for proof that an individual looked, dressed, or acted exactly as depicted.

Historical setting and perspective

Family history unfolds within the history of its neighbors. The lands of New Netherland and the Mohawk Valley were home to Indigenous communities long before European settlement; their experiences cannot be reduced to supporting characters in a settler genealogy. Wars and westward expansion created opportunities for some families and displacement or loss for others. This account places Fonda lives in those broader circumstances without claiming to speak for everyone who experienced them.

Likewise, the story of a person who served in a particular army, joined a political cause, or became a prominent public figure should not be taken as a statement of the beliefs of all descendants. The family's past is more interesting, and more credible, when its differences are allowed to remain visible.

A living archive, an unfinished story

The ten chapters follow the family from the seventeenth century into the modern era. Coverage necessarily becomes more selective as the story approaches living generations, both because accessible sources thin out and because privacy deserves respect. The Epilogue addresses those limits directly. This book therefore offers neither a final pedigree nor a last word, but a carefully framed account of the evidence and stories now available.

Its starting point is a set of names in old records. Its continuing purpose is to remember that behind those names stood people making decisions within the circumstances of their own times.

Chapter 1 — From Friesland to New Netherland

Marriage registers, baptisms, court proceedings and commercial records trace a family from Friesland to the upper Hudson. The ship that carried them remains unknown.



Figure 1.1. Illustrated overview of the journey from Eagum, Friesland, through Amsterdam and New Amsterdam to Fort Orange on the Hudson. Modern interpretive map; the precise Atlantic voyage is undocumented.

Document trail at a glance

A name in the records

The earliest secure Dutch archival documents identifying the couple at the beginning of the American Fonda story are the Amsterdam marriage banns of 19 January 1641 and the subsequent marriage notation at Diemen. They name Jelle Douwes of Agum (Eagum), Friesland, and Hester Douwes of Amsterdam. Their names later appear in several spellings, and Dutch patronymics should not be mistaken for fixed hereditary surnames.

Those entries are important not merely because they are early dates. They establish the people behind names that later appear in several forms: Jelle, Jellis, and Gillis; Douwes, Douwesz, and Douwens; and eventually Fonda. The records also remind us that seventeenth-century Dutch naming practices were fluid. Patronymics described family relationship rather than fixed surnames, so identification depends on context—date, place, witnesses, and household connections—not on name alone.

Harry Snijder's transcription, published with the Fonda Blog's "Dutch Banns" article, provides the detailed reading of the original handwriting. The Dutch archival entries reproduced here are accompanied by Harry Snijder's English transcription and explanation, published in the Fonda Blog article "Dutch Banns."

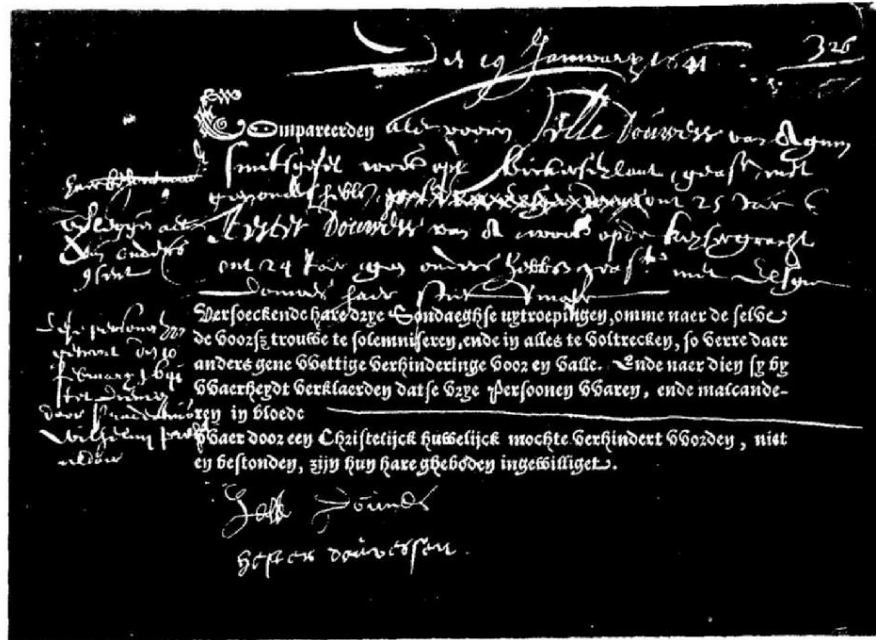


Figure 1.2. Marriage-banns entry for Jelle Douwes of Agum and Hester Douwes of Amsterdam, dated 19 January 1641, with note of marriage at Diemen on 10 February 1641. Family-held scan; interpretation follows the "Dutch Banns" article and Harry Snijder's 2009 translation.

Who Were Jelle's Parents?

Eagum, Friesland · An unresolved family question

A tiny Frisian village can be a tempting place to build a family tree. With so few households to choose from, one plausible name may begin to look like an answer. For Jelle Douwes, however, the most persistent question lies just beyond the surviving evidence: who were his parents?

A frequently repeated identification makes him a son of Douwe Everts, a farmer at Hornemastate in Eagum. As Kerst Huisman explains in *Famous Frisians in America*, the suggestion grew from work by village historian D. F. van der Meer. But Jelle was not among the children originally located for Douwe Everts in the records. His name was subsequently added to the proposed family, and the theory acquired a certainty the documents had never supplied.

There were reasons to consider it. The names and location seemed to fit, and Eagum was a small community. Yet a shared patronymic and a plausible village association cannot establish a father-son relationship. Jelle's recorded occupation as a journeyman smith suggests a working life that may have differed from that of an established landholding farmer, but occupation alone cannot settle the matter either.

Other traditions take the family farther afield, to a noble house in Genoa or to Huguenot refugees. These colorful accounts were repeated in older genealogies without documentary chains connecting them to Jelle. Modern Y-DNA comparisons provide another kind of clue to distant paternal ancestry, not an identification of a particular seventeenth-century parent. Broad haplogroup labels cannot prove that Jelle descended from one named family—or a particular European nation.

The honest conclusion is also the useful one: Jelle's Frisian connection is documented; his parentage is not. A careful family history can preserve a promising hypothesis without converting it into an ancestor.

*Documentary basis: The Fonda Blog, "Common Misconceptions," and "Fonda DNA and History"; Kerst Huisman, "The Fondas," in *Famous Frisians in America*, pp. 111–112. The Douwe Everts identification remains unverified; Y-DNA results do not establish Jelle's parents.*

The Journeyman Smith and His Bride

Amsterdam and Diemen · 1641

On a January day in 1641, a journeyman smith from Friesland entered the written record of Amsterdam with the woman he intended to marry. His name was Jelle Douwes. Hers was Hester Douwes. Neither was yet known to history as a Fonda, and nothing in the marriage entry foretold that their descendants would one day spread across America.

The banns, dated 19 January, tell a small story with surprising precision. Jelle came from Agum—Eagum, a Frisian village—and was living on Bickers Island, in a district shaped by Amsterdam's waterside commerce. Hester lived on the Keizersgracht, one of the city's canals. The banns describe both as appearing without their parents; a further annotation indicates Jelle's parents had died. Hester was assisted by her stepmother, Elsgen Douwes, but the entry does not establish whether both her biological parents were deceased. These are dry details on a page until one considers what they meant: two young adults navigating marriage and family obligations in a large and unfamiliar city.

Jelle was described as a journeyman smith. His trade connected him to practical, indispensable work: tools, iron fittings, repairs, and the busy material life of a port. Yet the record does not say whether he enjoyed the craft or how he first met Hester. We can place them on the Amsterdam map, but we cannot supply the conversations they had.

The register says the couple married at Diemen on 10 February 1641. Within the years that followed, Amsterdam records would associate them with children and household losses. A decade later, Jelle—then more often rendered Gillis or Jellis—would appear in New Netherland. For now, the moment belongs to an apprentice and his bride: two names carefully entered in a book, on the threshold of a life that neither document nor descendant can fully recover.

A family in Amsterdam

The surviving Amsterdam material gives only glimpses of the young household, but they are unusually valuable. One supplied register image, clarified through the same blog article, is not another banns record but a baptismal entry. According to Snijder's translation, it identifies Jelle Douwes as the father, Ester Douwes as the mother, Annetje Jans as witness, and their firstborn son as Douwe. This is one of the rare moments when the family can be seen not in retrospective genealogy but in a contemporary parish register.

Later family research identifies additional children: Geertien, Sara, and Abraham. A separate genealogical transcription reports that Abraham, son of Jelis Douwes and Hester Douwes, was baptized on 14 April 1647 at Amsterdam's Oude Kerk. We do not yet have that original baptism image for the chapter, but the reference is consistent with the family reconstruction. What we do have from a later published source is a sober reminder of the fragility of seventeenth-century family life. In *Famous Frisians in America*, Kerst Huisman reports finding an Amsterdam burial-book entry dated 28 October 1650 for "Abraham Gillisz.," which he identifies as probably the youngest son of Jellis and Hester. Because the burial image itself is not yet in hand, that identification should be presented as probable rather than certain.

These records establish a household rooted in Amsterdam in the 1640s, connected to Frisian origins and urban Dutch life. They do not tell us why the family left for America. Later retellings naturally speak of opportunity or freedom, but no surviving document states a motive. The honest historical answer is that the reason for departure remains unknown.

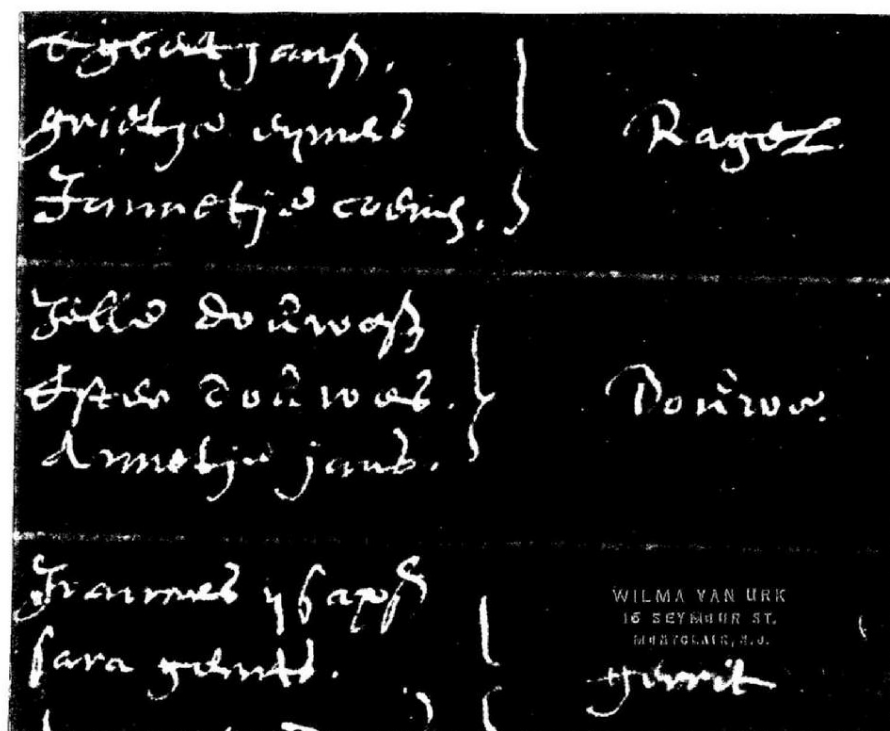


Figure 1.3. Amsterdam baptismal-register extract associated with Douwe, son of Jelle Douwes and Ester Douwes, with Annetje Jans named as witness, according to Harry Snijder's reading published in the Fonda Blog's "Dutch Banns" article. The original archival reference remains to be checked.

The ocean between

The family's migration must have taken place between the late-October 1650 burial evidence and Jellis's first secure appearance in the upper Hudson records in October 1651. The family archive examined the voyage by comparing the last known Amsterdam evidence with the first documented appearance in New Netherland, then reviewing ships known to have crossed during that interval. None of the surviving evidence names the family on a particular ship.

Among the possible vessels identified in that comparison were the *Bonte Koe* and the *Prins Willem*. Surviving passenger information for these voyages is incomplete. But the absence of a family name from reconstructed lists is weak negative evidence. Passenger data for seventeenth-century New Netherland voyages is incomplete, and we should resist the temptation to convert a good hypothesis into a certainty. The prudent formulation is that several 1651 crossings remain possible and the exact ship is still unknown.

A useful contemporary record confirms the movements of one candidate vessel. A bond dated 19 June 1651 at New Amsterdam concerns duties on merchandise shipped in the *Bonte Koe*. That record proves the vessel's presence in the port by mid-June and keeps it firmly in the range of plausible candidates. It does not, however, place Jellis, Hester, or their children aboard.

The colony they entered

When the family reached New Netherland, they entered a colonial world centered on trade and layered upon much older Indigenous geographies. New Amsterdam at the southern end of

Manhattan served as the colony's chief port. Farther north, Fort Orange and the patroonship of Rensselaerswyck formed a riverine commercial zone that depended on trade, transport, skilled labor, brewing, agriculture, and law. The people who lived there were not beginning from nothing; they were joining a settlement economy already connected to Mohawk communities, the Hudson, and Atlantic commerce.

Fort Orange, Beverwijck, and Albany should not be treated as interchangeable names. Fort Orange was a Dutch West India Company trading and military post beside the Hudson; the civilian settlement that developed nearby became known as Beverwijck. Following the English takeover in 1664, Beverwijck became Albany, which received its city charter in 1686. The older fort and the later town occupied distinct but adjoining sites. Across the Hudson, Greenen Bos (Greenbush) was where Gillis Fonda sought permission to distill liquor in October 1651. The court record does not place his household inside the fort.

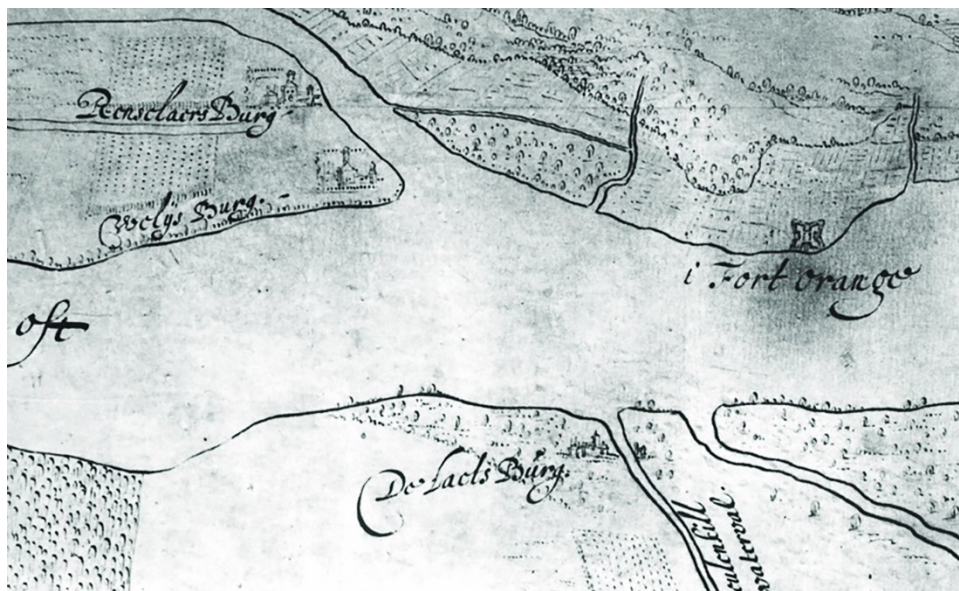


Figure 1.4. Fort Orange on the Hudson, from a circa-1630 Rensselaerswyck map (Wikimedia Commons, public-domain designation). The map predates the 1651 Fonda court entry.

The surviving circa-1630 Rensselaerswyck map separately identifies Fort Orange; it provides geographical evidence, although it predates the family's arrival by about twenty years.

The first documented foothold

The first securely verified American reference to Jellis is the October 19, 1651 Rensselaerswyck court minute. The accompanying vignette follows this unusually tangible moment in the immigrant family's early livelihood; the printed excerpt appears below.

The record places Gillis in Greenen Bos (Greenbush), across the Hudson from Fort Orange, and connects his proposed business to Evert Pels. It does not identify the family's vessel or date of landing.

The record also helps us resist overstatement. Earlier summaries sometimes dated the event to 15 October; the published court minutes show that the proceedings were held on 19 October 1651. That is the date the chapter should use. It is possible that the family had arrived weeks or

months earlier, but the October entry is the earliest American appearance verified directly for this chapter.

[91] Gillis Fonda earnestly requests permission to support himself by distilling liquor in the Greenen Bos, in the house belonging to Evert Pels, next to the brewery. His request is

granted on condition that he enters into a contract in regard to the duties to be paid to the honorable masters.

Figure 1.5. Consecutive passages from the published Minutes of the Court of Rensselaerswyck, 1648–1652, pp. 167–168. The sentence begins on p. 167 and concludes on p. 168; the record is dated 19 October 1651.

A Distillery Beside the Brewery

Greenen Bos (Greenbush) · 19 October 1651

The Atlantic crossing is missing from the surviving record of the Fonda family. We do not know the name of the vessel, the weather on the passage, or the day the passengers first stepped ashore. Then, on 19 October 1651, Gillis Fonda appears abruptly in a court record—and he has business to conduct.

He asked the Court of Rensselaerswyck for permission to earn a living by distilling liquor in the Greenen Bos, on the eastern bank of the Hudson. His proposed workplace was a house belonging to Evert Pels, adjoining the brewery. It was a practical proposal, and one that interested the colonial authorities because distilling was subject to duties. The court allowed it, provided Fonda entered into the required agreement about those payments.

The entry is remarkably concrete. It places Gillis not vaguely “at Albany,” a city that did not yet bear that name, but across the river from Fort Orange. It identifies a landlord, a neighboring brewery, and an occupation. Distilling tied local grain, fuel, trade, and taxes into the everyday economy of the patroonship. Permission mattered because business in the colony was not conducted wholly at a settler’s discretion.

Nothing in the minute tells us whether Gillis walked out of court pleased, whether his still was already assembled, or how profitable the undertaking proved. But one fact stands out. The first secure American record of this immigrant is not a passenger list or a land grant; it is a request for permission to work. The Fonda family’s documentary American story begins beside a brewery.

Hester comes into focus

If Jellis appears first as a distiller, Hester emerges in later records as an active businesswoman. Mrs. John Spell’s 1964 article, “A Career Woman in 17th Century New York,” published in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, is a historical synthesis rather than an original colonial record. Even so, it usefully assembles court references showing Hester

as an active trader and litigant. The article opens by stating that Gillis Douwse Fonda arrived in 1651 with his wife Hester Jans and three children, and it traces Hester's later activities through widowhood, remarriage, credit disputes, and the violence that struck Wiltwyck in 1663.

For this chapter, the article's greatest value is interpretive. It reminds us that the Fonda migration was not simply the story of one man crossing the Atlantic and founding a line. Hester appears as a participant in business, litigation, and household survival. She would outlive Jellis, remarry, and continue to appear in the records in ways that make her indispensable to the family story. Later translated Albany court materials identifying "Hester Douwens" further help bridge the Dutch patronymic forms of her name with the later Fonda family tradition.

The records thus suggest a story of shared family enterprise, in which Hester's commercial life merits attention alongside that of Jellis.



Figure 1.6. Fort Orange and merchant shipping on the Hudson, circa 1650. Modern AI-generated historical interpretation; not an exact architectural reconstruction or evidence of the Fonda family's ship.

A beginning, not a founding myth

By the end of 1651, Jellis and Hester had crossed from the records of Amsterdam into the records of New Netherland. We still do not know the exact ship, the private reasons for departure, or the emotional texture of the passage. What we do know is more valuable than invented certainty: a marriage bann and marriage date; at least one baptismal record in Amsterdam; a probable burial entry for a young child; a contemporary commercial record connected with one candidate vessel; and a verified court proceeding that places Gillis Fonda at Greenbush, beside a brewery, asking permission to distill liquor.

From these fragments, the opening of the American story can be told with confidence and restraint. The future village of Fonda, the later generations in the Mohawk Valley, and the wide branches of the family all begin here—not with a legend, but with documents.

Selected source notes

1. Geographical sources: the circa-1630 Rensselaerswyck map detail (public-domain reproduction, Wikimedia Commons); William Barnes, *The Settlement and Early History of Albany* (1864); and the 1686 Albany street-plan illustration supplied with this project. The English takeover occurred in 1664; Albany was chartered in 1686.
2. The Fonda Blog, “Dutch Banns,” published 20 August 2008, with Harry Snijder’s March 2009 translation and clarification. The article states that the full-page record is the marriage bann for Jelle Douwes and Hester Douwes and that the grid-like register image is a baptism record naming their firstborn son Douwe and witness Annetje Jans. It also gives the marriage date at Diemen as 10 February 1641.
3. Kerst Huisman, “The Fondas: descendants of the craftsman Jilles Douwes,” in *Famous Frisians in America* (Leeuwarden: Friese Pers Boekerij, 2009), especially pp. 108–111. On p. 109, Huisman reports an Amsterdam burial-book entry for Abraham Gillisz. dated 28 October 1650 and identifies him as probably the youngest son of Jellis and Hester.
4. “Voyage to America,” Fonda.org Stories, originally revised in 2009. Useful for the migration window and ship-candidate analysis, but the exact vessel remains unproved.
5. New Amsterdam bond concerning goods shipped in the Bonte Koe, dated 19 June 1651, from the New Netherland / New Amsterdam History Center transcription of provincial records. This confirms the vessel’s presence in New Amsterdam by that date but does not identify passengers.
6. Minutes of the Court of Rensselaerswyck, 1648–1652, printed pages 167–168, folios 90v–91, court proceedings of 19 October 1651. The published transcription records Gillis Fonda’s request to distill liquor in the Greenen Bos, next to the brewery, in the house of Evert Pels.
7. Mrs. John Spell, “A Career Woman in 17th Century New York,” *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 95, no. 3 (July 1964): 129–137. A secondary historical synthesis emphasizing Hester Jans Fonda’s court activity, remarriages, and survival in seventeenth-century New York.
8. The Fonda Blog, “Common Misconceptions,” <https://blog.fonda.org/archives/2603>; and “Fonda DNA and History,” <https://blog.fonda.org/archives/1362>. These identify the Douwe Everts and Italian-origin theories as unverified and discuss the limits of paternal-line DNA evidence.
9. Additional citation: Minutes of the Court of Fort Orange and Beverwyck, 1652–1660, pp. 116–117 (for the 1653 commercial dispute).

Chapter 2 — Becoming an American Family

For the first generation of Fondas in New Netherland, becoming American was not a single event. It happened across decades in homes, workshops, courtrooms, trading exchanges, church records, and family relationships—while the territory itself passed from Dutch to English rule. Their story is recorded most vividly through the determined commercial life of Hester, whose name appears in the records long after the first mention of her husband in 1651.

Living beside Fort Orange

The court entry of 19 October 1651 places Gillis Fonda at Greenen Bos, or Greenbush, across the Hudson from Fort Orange. He sought permission to distill liquor in a house belonging to Evert Pels, adjacent to a brewery. The entry does not tell us the precise date of the household's arrival or whether their distilling enterprise immediately succeeded. It does establish that Gillis was pursuing a livelihood in a small but commercially active community.

The region was not one neatly bounded town. Fort Orange was a Dutch West India Company military and trading post beside the Hudson, while the civilian settlement of Beverwijck grew nearby, beyond the fort. The patroonship of Rensselaerswyck imposed another layer of landholding and authority. Greenen Bos (Greenbush), where Gillis first appears in the 1651 court record, lay across the river. Neither his permit nor the surrounding records establish that the family lived inside Fort Orange.

The early Fonda papers provide a more modest picture than a founding legend. According to the older family compilation and a later historical article, on 16 June 1653 Gillis disputed the delivery of a hog for which he had paid in brandy. The account deserves checking against the original court minute before we adopt its exact monetary judgment. Yet its underlying subject—livestock exchanged for distilled liquor—captures an economy in which cash, pelts, manufactured goods, and produce could all become units of trade.

The development of Beverwijck also depended on relations with Indigenous peoples, especially the Mohawk and their trading networks. The Dutch were newcomers in an established Indigenous world. The exchanges sustaining European shops and households could not be separated from competition over land, political authority, and the fur trade. For the Fondas, prosperity and insecurity belonged to the same landscape.

A businesswoman in the records

By 1658, Hester appears in accounts of the Beverwijck court proceedings as a creditor and trader. The cases concern ordinary goods and obligations, but they also document a woman prepared to pursue business matters through the available legal institutions. The following episode gives one concrete example.

Court records preserve disputes rather than a full portrait of anyone's character. Still, the recurring references to Hester make it clear that she participated in the local economy in her own right.

A later family account suggests that Gillis suffered ill health before his death, usually dated to 1659 in the family chronology. The actual death record has not been reproduced for this chapter. What can be said with confidence from the later court narrative is that Hester's commercial activity continued. Her life as a widow would involve far more than managing a diminished household.



Figure 2.1. Original editorial illustration of a Dutch colonial courtroom debate, used here as a contextual image for Hester Douw Fonda's appearances in the colonial courts. Modern AI-generated historical interpretation based on earlier black-and-white reference material.

Hester Goes to Court

Beverwijck · 1658

A gun had changed hands. Three beaver pelts had not. In a little Dutch settlement beside the Hudson, that was enough to bring a dispute into court—and to bring Hester Fonda into the surviving record as a businesswoman in her own right.

According to Mrs. John Spell's account of the Beverwijck court proceedings, Hester sought payment from Hans Vos for a gun she had sold him. The amount was three beavers. The unit is revealing. In the Hudson Valley fur trade, a beaver pelt was more than an animal skin; it could serve as a measure of value in a local economy where many obligations were settled through goods or credit rather than coins.

The gun was not the only object in the disputes that made Hester visible. Spell also recounts an argument involving a petticoat that Ludovicus Cobus said Hester had taken from a fence. Hester's explanation was different: she maintained that the garment had been given to her as security for a debt. Elsewhere an apron and undershirt figured among pledged goods. The objects are humble, but the stakes were serious. For traders and households with limited ready cash, unpaid debts and missing collateral were not small matters.

These court appearances do not license us to imagine Hester winning every argument, or to assign her a ready-made modern personality. Court minutes disproportionately record disagreement. What they do show, through Spell's compilation, is a woman extending credit, claiming payment, and invoking legal processes to settle accounts. Her commercial world ran through the same channels as her neighbors': trust, bargaining, disputed possessions, and a magistrate's decision.

Behind the familiar phrase "family business" was someone willing to appear in court and say that an obligation remained unsettled. Hester's name survives because she did not always leave such matters to others.

*Source: Mrs. John Spell, "A Career Woman in 17th Century New York," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 95, no. 3 (July 1964): 129–137. The Hans Vos, Ludovicus Cobus, and clothing-pledge examples are reported through Spell's secondary account; the original Beverwijck court entries and outcomes remain to be checked.*



Marriage, movement, and a new household

In 1660 Hester married Barent Gerritsen, described in the 1964 study as a younger widower. His own career combined farm labor, trade, and distilling. The court material brings both adults into view as people who managed debts and commercial arrangements while attempting to build a viable life together. Hester's son Douwe and daughter Geertien also begin to appear in the wider network of family business and marriage.

Early in 1662, according to Spell's reconstruction, Hester, Barent, and Hester's daughter Sara moved to Wiltwyck, farther down the Hudson near the Esopus Creek. This was a Dutch colonial settlement in a region cultivated and inhabited by indigenous Esopus communities. Conflict in the area had already led the colonial government to construct a protective stockade. A move to Wiltwyck therefore connected the household not only to opportunity but also to the insecurity of frontier colonization.

Spell's account describes Barent's work as a distiller and Hester's continued trading. Establishing a household at Wiltwyck also involved an extended disagreement with a carpenter—a revealing episode of everyday life before the settlement's wartime crisis.

The Carpenter and the Unfinished House

Wiltwyck · c. 1662–1663

A house is easy to describe in a family history once it has been built. It is harder—and often more interesting—to follow the argument over getting it built at all.

After Hester and her second husband, Barent Gerritsen, moved to Wiltwyck, they tried to establish a household and continue their commercial work. Mrs. John Spell's reconstruction of the local court records describes a sustained dispute with the carpenter engaged to construct their house. The disagreements concerned materials, workmanship, wages, food, and delays. A home on paper had become an accumulation of contested promises.

We do not know what the unfinished work looked like at each stage, and the account should not be transformed into a scene of shouting or slammed doors. But the categories of complaint are eloquent. Timber and labor had to be found and paid for. Food could become part of an arrangement with a workman. A delay could affect when a household moved in, what it could store, and whether a business could operate. The builder, for his part, depended on compensation for work already done.

The dispute also places Hester in a different part of colonial life from the trading debts of Beverwijck. Here the question was not only what goods were owed, but what made a house finished and an obligation fulfilled. Wiltwyck was a small colonial settlement in a region where relations between Dutch settlers and Esopus communities had already turned violent. Building a home there was an economic undertaking in a precarious setting.

Within a short time, the larger conflict of 1663 would overwhelm the household and its plans. Yet the carpenter case deserves to stand on its own. It is a glimpse of history at the scale at which families actually lived: a promised roof, disputed labor, and the exhausting business of making a place habitable.

Source: Spell, "A Career Woman in 17th Century New York" (1964), pp. 129–137, summarizing Wiltwyck court proceedings. The carpenter's identity, exact hearing dates, decisions, and terms of contract should be confirmed against the original court minutes before publication.

The crisis at Wiltwyck

On 7 June 1663, violence broke into Wiltwyck. Colonial accounts describe attacks on the settlement, houses destroyed, deaths, and captives carried away. The attack occurred during what historians commonly call the Esopus Wars, a series of conflicts arising amid Dutch settlement, land pressure, military actions, and deteriorating relations with Esopus communities. We should not reduce this history to an unexplained assault on innocent colonists; the Indigenous and Dutch perspectives must both be considered in the full book.

In Spell's account, Barent Gerritsen was killed, while Hester and Sara (who was nearly 18 at the time) were captured. Hester was eventually released, but Sara's subsequent fate is not established by the sources assembled for this chapter. The available family narrative describes her as lost following the captivity, but it does not supply a confirmed death record; we should not treat that absence as proof of death. Hester, however, returned to the vicinity of Fort Orange carrying the consequences of a devastating family and economic loss.

The familiar family version describes her as impoverished and later suffering impaired hearing. These details occur in secondary retellings and should be attributed to them until better primary evidence is located. Even without those embellishments, the losses and dislocation documented in the historical narrative were grave enough. For the Fonda household, the wars changed both where its members could live and how they might make a living.

Rebuilding through family and commerce

The 1964 article follows Hester as she re-established herself in the Albany region. She sought money owed to her late husband's estate, made claims through the courts, and continued selling goods. A court transaction of April 1664 is particularly suggestive: the narrative reports the sale of brewing or distilling equipment associated with her first husband, with Douwe Fonda and Geertien participating. Here business and kinship intersect. The children who had crossed the Atlantic with their parents were now adults taking part in the community's transactions.

One of the distinctive features of the early Dutch colonial records is how often women appear as recognizable economic actors. Hester was not necessarily typical in the scale or persistence of her recorded lawsuits, but neither was she an inexplicable exception to every social rule. Widowhood, property claims, debt collection, and remarriage could give women complicated legal and commercial responsibilities. Her story is most illuminating when placed within that broader setting rather than cast as a modern career narrative transplanted into the seventeenth century.

The family continued to grow across connected households. Geertien's marriage to Jan Juriansen Becker, described in the family compilation, tied the Fondas to another Albany-area household. Douwe's later presence in court records anchors the next generation. Those individuals will become more important in the following chapters, when the family branches move beyond the immediate setting of Fort Orange and Beverwijck.

Dutch habits under English rule

In 1664 the English took control of New Netherland. Beverwijck became Albany, honoring the Duke of York and Albany, while New Amsterdam was renamed New York. These names describe successive political jurisdictions, but not a simple renaming of one fort. The older riverside Fort Orange and the later fortified Albany town were separate, neighboring sites. Albany did not receive its municipal charter until 1686. Dutch language, congregations, family networks, and commercial customs nevertheless persisted after the change in sovereignty.

A later Albany street plan identifies old Fort Orange independently of the fortification associated with the chartered city. The 1695 plan reproduced here illustrates that later settlement; it must not be mistaken for a drawing of Fort Orange as it stood in 1651.

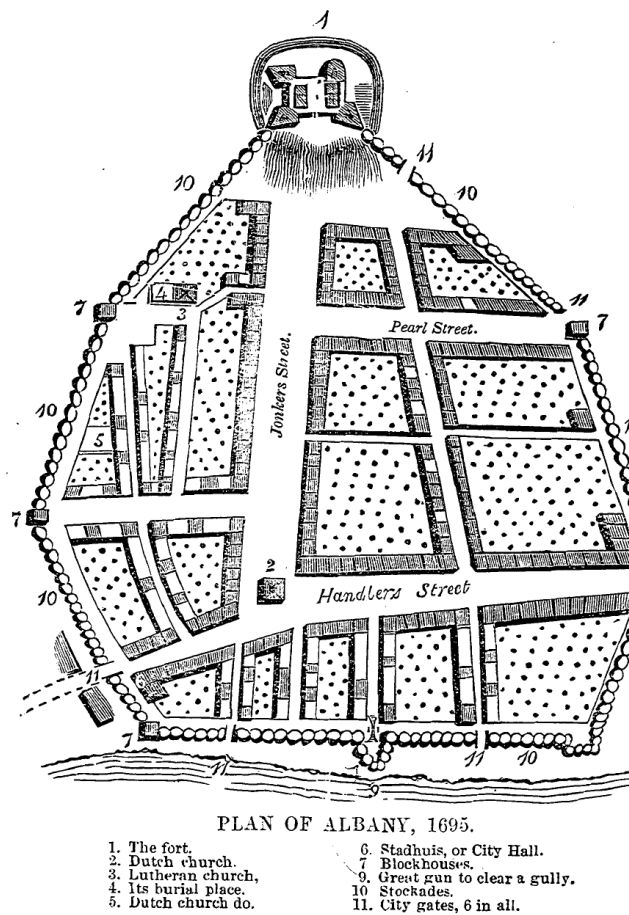


Figure 2.2. Plan of Albany in 1695, reproduced by William Barnes (1864). It shows a later town arrangement and should not be read as a site plan of Fort Orange in 1651.

For later descendants it is tempting to imagine the beginning of an unmistakably “American” identity on the day the colony changed hands. The actual process was slower. Families could remain culturally Dutch across generations while adapting to English government and to a changing regional economy. Their children inherited both the ties of their parents’ old world and the opportunities and conflicts of a colonial society that was becoming something else.

An enduring presence

Hester remarried again in 1670, to Theunis Dircksz van Vechten, according to the 1964 article. The marriage is portrayed as another arrangement through which she continued to manage property and debts. A published transcription of Albany Reformed Dutch Church records includes an entry dated 2 February 1690: Anna, child of Douwe Jelisz., with Hester Jansz. named as a sponsor. The identification of that sponsor as Hester Fonda is persuasive in its family context, though the record does not state her death date. This is a more fitting close than any

invented farewell. An aging immigrant woman appears not in a story told about her centuries later, but in the written life of a family and church that had endured.

The second generation grew up in a place their parents had chosen but could never fully control. They learned its commerce, endured its conflicts, married into neighboring families, and left records of their own. Over time, the family's center of gravity would move toward the Mohawk Valley. That movement is the subject of the next chapter. Here the foundational change is quieter: a newly arrived family had become part of the society along the upper Hudson, and its children were already shaping the life that would follow.

Documentary sources and editorial notes

1. Family archive, "01_Dutch Settlements" in the Fonda family archive. Used as a guide to family episodes and chronology; it also contains general historical background that is not treated as independently verified. The 1653 hog dispute and the family's move between Greenbush and Beverwijck need precise court references.
2. Mrs. John Spell, "A Career Woman in 17th Century New York," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 95, no. 3 (July 1964): 129–137. Family-supplied scan. Principal secondary source for Hester's 1658 suits, remarriages, Wiltwyck captivity, later commercial dealings, and final recorded appearance.
3. Minutes of the Court of Rensselaerswyck, 1648–1652, 167–168, folios 90v–91 (19 October 1651). The verified entry about Gillis Fonda's distilling permission was reproduced in Chapter 1 and supplies the opening link to this chapter.
4. New Netherland Institute, "Albany," historical digital exhibition, for the growth of Beverwijck, local trade, and the English takeover of 1664.
<https://newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/a-tour-of-new-netherland/albany/albany/>
5. New Netherland Institute, introduction to Fort Orange Records, 1656–1678, for the creation of the Fort Orange/Beverwijck jurisdiction in 1652.
https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/application/files/4616/8372/5016/Fort_Orange_Records_16561678.pdf
6. New Netherland Institute, "Esopus," for the colonial settlement, stockade, and Esopus Wars background.
<https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/digital-exhibitions/a-tour-of-new-netherland/hudson-river/esopus>
7. Minutes of the Court of Fort Orange and Beverwyck, 1652–1660, edited and translated by Arnold J. F. van Laer. Published transcription available through digitized copies; further pinpoint citations would be needed to corroborate specific family lawsuits.
8. Reformed Dutch Church of Albany baptismal records, 1683–1700, published in *Year Book of the Holland Society of New York* (1904), p. 49. Under 2 February 1690: "Anna, of Douwe Jelis. Wit.: father, Teunis Slingerlandt. By Hester Jansz." Online transcription:
<https://mathcs.clarku.edu/~djoyce/gen/albany/part1.html>
9. William Barnes, *The Settlement and Early History of Albany* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1864), unnumbered preliminary leaf, "Plan of Albany, 1695." Map reproduced in this chapter to illustrate the later urban setting, not the precise layout at the family's arrival.

10. Additional citation for Hester's activities: Mrs. John Spell, "A Career Woman in 17th Century New York," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 95, no. 3 (July 1964), p. 129.

Chapter 3 — Up the Mohawk

A river could connect settlements, markets, and generations. Along the Mohawk, the Fonda name would become attached not merely to a household but, eventually, to a place.

Beyond Beverwijck

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the descendants of the first Dutch immigrant household belonged to a growing web of families, churches, and trading communities in the upper Hudson region. The chapter now moves westward from Albany and Schenectady toward the Mohawk Valley. It does not imply that all branches moved together or that the land was an empty frontier waiting to be occupied.

The Mohawk River formed a practical corridor between the Hudson and the inland country. Along its banks and tributaries were established Mohawk communities, farms, cultivated land, paths, and trading networks long before Dutch settlers appeared. European settlement brought new claims to land and authority, but those claims were made in a landscape whose Indigenous history cannot be reduced to a preface to colonial expansion.

As families spread beyond Albany, a household name could appear in different forms in different records. Fonda, Fonday, patronymic spellings, and names attached to spouses and witnesses can point to related people, but each link needs context. The surviving family compilation is valuable precisely because it gathers those scattered names; its proposed relationships should still be checked when they become decisive to the narrative.

A valley of crossings

From Albany, the river route west passed through the Schenectady region and toward settlements that developed near Caughnawaga. Boats carried goods during navigable seasons; overland tracks connected farms, mills, church gatherings, and distant markets. Commerce and farming were not separate worlds. The same family might manage land, exchange grain, sell produce, operate a shop, or serve in a local militia.

The family archive records a varied working world. It places descendants among millers, merchants, farmers, ministers, and physicians, although many of the named examples belong to a later generation. The mixture reminds us that this was neither an exclusively farming family nor one that moved west as a single unit. The river connected households pursuing different occupations.

Place-names can be deceptive across centuries. The Caughnawaga of colonial New York, the later village of Fonda, and modern municipal boundaries are not interchangeable locations or eras. Where exact boundaries matter, maps and land records will control the description; evocative later town views will be labeled by their actual dates.



Figure 3.1. Tryon County, from a 1777 map of New York and New Jersey based on Claude Joseph Sauthier's surveys and engraved by Matthew Albert Lotter. Cropped historical map; Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

Douw Jellis Fonda and the next generations

Family genealogies identify Douw Jellis Fonda (1700–1780) as an important link between the earlier Dutch-American generations and the families associated with the Mohawk country. His reported dates and relationships are preserved in the family compilation; the underlying baptismal, land, and probate evidence has not yet been independently assembled for this book. Even with that limitation, the family tradition points toward a gradual extension of kinship from the Albany region into the valley.

His importance to the book is not simply genealogical. Across the generations, farms and businesses could become the centers of neighboring households. Sons and daughters married into other Dutch-descended families, and children might remain near their parents or establish households farther along the valley. The records of baptism, marriage, deeds, courts, and inventories preserve glimpses of that process, although they cannot convey the full texture of family relationships.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the descendants whose names recur in the family archive included John Douw Fonda and Adam Douw Fonda. Their later public roles belong principally to the Revolutionary chapter, but their earlier lives illustrate the family's regional connections through Schenectady, Caughnawaga, and the Mohawk corridor. Where later

biographies disagree on birthplaces, landownership, or ancestry, we should not merge them into a single certain account.



Figure 3.2. Original editorial portrait illustration representing Douw Jellis Fonda (1700–1780). This is a modern contextual image rather than a verified contemporary likeness.

Farming, water power, and everyday work

Water determined much of the valley's working geography. The Mohawk supported movement between communities; smaller streams drove mill wheels. Cayadutta Creek, which descends from the hills north of the river, later became closely associated with the settlement where the Fonda name took hold. Gristmills mattered because grain was useful only when it could be processed, transported, and traded.

Later Fonda activity gives a glimpse of what water power could make possible. The family outline records Henry Vrooman Fonda among the participants in an 1811 cotton-mill enterprise, with a woolen mill and carding machinery attached. Because that undertaking belongs to the nineteenth century, it does not prove that the same family operated those mills before the Revolution. Instead, it shows how creekside industry eventually joined agriculture and trade as part of the local economy.

The ordinary tasks of valley households seldom make dramatic histories: planting fields, milling grain, transporting goods, collecting debts, or sponsoring a child at baptism. Yet it was this work that tied neighbors and relatives to one another. Court books and church registers

preserved occasional details, allowing later generations to see the outlines of everyday lives without supplying every conversation or motive.

Caughnawaga and the making of a local center

The settlement later known as Fonda developed near Caughnawaga and the meeting of local routes with the Mohawk River. A family name eventually becoming a place-name can make settlement appear inevitable in retrospect. It was not. The region changed through Indigenous dispossession, colonial land transactions, migration, warfare, commerce, roads, canals, and railroads over a much longer span than one family's lifetime.



Figure 3.3. Original editorial illustration of an eighteenth-century Mohawk Valley village street, used here as a contextual image for the working landscape and settlement life of Caughnawaga and its neighboring communities.

The village name “Fonda” belongs to a later stage in this history. Family associations with the area are not by themselves proof that one individual founded the community or determined its name. Caughnawaga and the later village of Fonda should therefore be treated as distinct historical labels. Pinning down the earliest recorded use of the village name, and which household it commemorated, remains a worthwhile source question rather than a settled fact.

The distinction between a historically documented settlement and a family tradition about its naming is essential. Properly handled, it does not weaken the story. Instead, it shows how memory and geography become entwined.

Kinship on the eve of revolution

By the 1770s, the family was part of a valley that had become strategically important to competing imperial and colonial powers. The same roads that connected farms and mills could

bring soldiers; the same trading relationships that sustained households could be disrupted by war. The political choices of individual family members would not necessarily be uniform.

The Sheriff, the Scythe, and the Hoe

John Douw Fonda (1741–1813) · Mohawk District · 1775

One summer day in 1775, the American Revolution reached John Fonda's farm by way of an ordinary footpath. On June 25, Thomas Hunt, a servant of Tryon County Sheriff Alexander White, crossed land where Fonda had planted meadow grass and peas. John Kinton, who was plowing nearby, later testified that Hunt carried a brush scythe across his shoulder. Fonda, holding a hoe, told Hunt to keep to the path beside the fence so he would not damage the crop.

Hunt refused. Kinton saw the two men grapple, but said he did not see either strike a blow; he heard Hunt threaten Fonda's life. When the dispute was brought before the Tryon County Committee of Safety that August, Fonda gave his own account under oath. He said Hunt raised the scythe as if to strike, and that he responded with his hoe, knocking Hunt down. Fonda maintained that he then went home, leaving Hunt behind. The two accounts are not identical in every detail, but both place a quarrel over cultivated land at the center of the affair.

The sheriff's response gave the episode its larger significance. White arrested Fonda and put him in the county jail at Johnstown. By that summer, colonial authority in the Mohawk Valley was already being contested, and an arrest by the royal sheriff could become a matter for the revolutionary committees as well as the courts.

Samuel Ludlow Frey, writing in explanatory notes to the published minutes in 1905, supplied the sequel. He reported that Fonda's supporters went to Johnstown one night and released him. They also attempted to arrest White, who fired into the crowd. Shots were exchanged, and White escaped. Frey's version is a later historical narrative, not a second sworn deposition; its particulars should therefore be attributed to him rather than presented as the committee's eyewitness finding.

A footpath across a planted field had thus become entangled in the struggle over who possessed the right to enforce law in Tryon County. For John Fonda, the upheaval did not end with his release. Five years later, during the 1780 raid on Caughnawaga, he and his brother Adam would be taken captive and carried toward Canada—a story to which the next chapter returns.

Sources: The Minute Book of the Committee of Safety of Tryon County (1905), pp. 49–51 (testimony recorded 25 Aug. 1775), and pp. 136–137 (Samuel Ludlow Frey's later historical notes). The account of the 1780 captivity is part of the family narrative addressed in Chapter 4, not documented by these 1775 depositions.

The confrontation with Sheriff White reveals how abruptly a family dispute could enter the political struggles of 1775. Other Fondas also appear in the Tryon County proceedings. Adam Fonda repeatedly attended as a representative of the Mohawk District; the minutes name him among those chosen to carry the committee's concerns to Guy Johnson. Those appearances place him within the political life of the valley before the fighting reached the Fonda households themselves.

By the time the Revolutionary War reached the Mohawk Valley, the family's westward connections were well established. The same farms, roads, meeting places, and waterways that supported commerce would become vulnerable to violence and displacement. John and Adam Fonda, together with other relatives, reappear in the next chapter amid that upheaval.

Sources and questions for final verification

1. Family archive: “03_Mohawk Valley.html,” in the archived family-history materials. It supplies family relationships and later occupational examples; its specific life dates and landholding claims are not all independently verified.
2. Geographic context: William Barnes, *The Settlement and Early History of Albany* (1864); Arthur James Weise, *The History of the City of Albany* (1884), both provided in the project. These works principally cover the Hudson and Albany and are historical secondary sources with nineteenth-century viewpoints, not definitive evidence of a Mohawk Valley family land grant.
3. The Minute Book of the Committee of Safety of Tryon County, the Old New York Frontier (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), pp. 49–51 (sworn testimony recorded 25 August 1775), and Samuel Ludlow Frey’s explanatory notes, pp. 136–137 (later reconstruction of the rescue). Also pp. 16, 18, 24, and 43–44 for Adam Fonda’s committee involvement.
4. Open verification questions: Douw Jellis Fonda’s vital dates and exact line of descent; dated Mohawk Valley land and tax records; first attested use of “Fonda” as a village name.
5. Geographic context: Mohawk/Haudenosaunee communities, diplomacy, and landholding long predated European settlement. Specific land transactions remain outside the documentary claims of this chapter.
6. Further source: F. W. Beers & Co., *History of Montgomery and Fulton Counties, New York* (1878), p. 142.

Chapter 4 — Revolution in the Valley

The Revolution came to the Mohawk Valley not as a distant argument about Parliament but as an argument among neighbors, a test of old loyalties, and eventually a struggle over homes, farms, and lives. The Fonda family had established itself along the river before the war. By its end, much of that familiar world had been burned or transformed.

Neighbors divided

The Mohawk corridor was a place of overlapping communities and competing allegiances. Mohawk and Oneida towns, other Haudenosaunee nations, Dutch-descended households, German-speaking settlers, and the influential Johnson family all had stakes in what happened there. There was no single position shared by every Indigenous community or every settler. Some inhabitants supported resistance to British rule, others remained loyal to the Crown, and many faced pressures that made neutrality precarious.

Sir William Johnson, who had long exercised influence in northern New York as superintendent of Indian affairs, died in 1774. His son Sir John Johnson and nephew Guy Johnson inherited important positions and relationships, while committees formed by opponents of British policy began to claim authority for local decisions. Disputes about meeting, arms, travel, and jurisdiction were therefore not merely ideological. They affected who could move on the roads, issue orders, or arrest a neighbor.

The Tryon County Committee of Safety minute book documents these tensions with unusual immediacy. Its meetings during the spring and summer of 1775 named perceived threats, arranged communication between districts, and discussed protection of settlements. Its language was openly partisan: it reveals what committee members believed and feared, not an impartial view of every inhabitant. As a record of their actions, however, it is indispensable.



Figure 4.1. North view of Fort Johnson, drawn on the spot by Guy Johnson, 1759.
New York Public Library Digital Gallery; Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

The Fondas take part

Adam Fonda is a recurring name in the committee proceedings. He appears among the Mohawk District representatives at meetings in 1775 and among a delegation instructed to carry a letter to Guy Johnson. These are more than family recollections: they place an Adam Fonda within the local political organization as the crisis developed. The family archive identifies him as Adam Douw Fonda. Consistent with the naming note planned for this book, that fuller form is used for clarity but should not be mistaken for the precise wording of each contemporary entry.

On 25 August 1775 the committee also heard sworn statements about a quarrel between John Fonda and Thomas Hunt, servant to Sheriff Alexander White. That incident, told in the preceding chapter as “The Sheriff, the Scythe, and the Hoe,” had begun over a route through planted ground. White’s subsequent imprisonment of John, and his reported release by associates, showed how an apparently ordinary dispute had become inseparable from the struggle over political authority. It needs no second full telling here; the important consequence is that John entered the revolutionary period already acquainted with arrest and confrontation.

Major Jelles Fonda likewise appears in the published committee material. His statements concerned White’s threatening conduct toward supporters of the resistance. Later notes by Samuel Ludlow Frey describe Jelles’s militia and public service, including his presence at Oriskany in 1777. Those biographical summaries are useful but should be attributed to Frey until their individual commission and service records are checked. Together, these appearances show a family with several members involved in the region’s political and military life.



Figure 4.2. Original editorial illustration of a Revolutionary-era town assembly, used here as a contextual image for local committees, wartime justice, and civic conflict in the Mohawk Valley.

Oriskany and a war near home

In August 1777, the Battle of Oriskany, fought during the campaign around Fort Stanwix, made the war painfully local. Militia forces attempting to relieve the fort were ambushed by an opposing force that included Loyalists and allied Haudenosaunee warriors. The campaign deepened divisions across the Six Nations and among the valley's families. Frey's published notes place Major Jelles Fonda with his regiment at Oriskany; the present chapter treats that as a sourced later account rather than a complete service record.

The same geography that had helped build local prosperity now exposed residents to danger. Roads carried intelligence and military parties; boats moved people and supplies along the Mohawk; fortified houses and small posts offered imperfect shelter. Farming did not cease simply because campaigning began, yet harvests, livestock, grain stores, and workshops could be targets. By 1780, raids on the valley threatened the foundations of household life.

May 1780: the raid on Caughnawaga

The family outline, drawing on nineteenth-century New York histories, places Sir John Johnson's destructive raid in the Mohawk region in late May 1780, commonly dated to 22 May. The narrative describes a force of Loyalists, British personnel, and Indigenous allies moving through settlements including Caughnawaga, Tribes Hill, and the Johnstown area. Houses and outbuildings were burned; residents were killed or carried away. Estimates of the force size, deaths, and buildings destroyed vary among retrospective accounts and should remain attributed rather than stated as a modern verified count.

The house of Douw Jellis Fonda, whose farm and family connections anchored the preceding chapter, was among the places struck. He was elderly—about eighty according to the family’s reconstructed dates—and the later account describes him as unwilling or unable to flee. It is here that the big movements of the war reduce to a devastating household story.

Penelope Grant, described in the older narrative as a young Scottish woman living with Douw, reportedly tried to persuade him to escape with the neighbors making for higher ground. The account says he refused, taking up his gun and promising to defend her. Penelope left. According to the same history, Douw was subsequently taken from his house and killed. Later authors name a Mohawk man called “One-armed Peter” as the perpetrator, but we do not have a separately verified eyewitness deposition establishing that identification or the reported exchange of words. The death is central to the family history; the colorful details belong to the attributed historical tradition.

The narrative also states that enslaved people held in Douw’s household were taken to Canada during the raid. This detail must not be dropped from a family history. It reminds us that the valley’s economic world included coerced labor, and that people whose names seldom survive in family genealogies also suffered the violence and dislocation of war. The reported number and subsequent fate of those captives are not yet independently documented.

A major’s household destroyed

Major Jelles Fonda’s house and store were also reported burned. In the family compilation he is described as a prosperous merchant, dealing in goods and produce over an extensive trading network. Accounts say that he was away on public business when the raiders arrived. His wife and son Douw were at the house but escaped toward the river after hearing the alarm. The reported flight by ferry and on horseback gives another family-scale view of the attack, even though its dialogue and sequence come through later narratives.

The losses to the major’s household are described in striking detail: store goods, furniture, and an unusual musical clock. We can convey the destruction without asserting the precise monetary value later assigned to the property as an audited figure. Whatever the financial estimate, the consequences extended beyond a single house: records, stores, tools, and networks built over decades could disappear in an afternoon.



Figure 4.3. Original editorial illustration of a Mohawk Valley homestead after the war, used here as a contextual image for rebuilding, landholding, and the postwar world associated with Major Jelles Douw Fonda.

The Music in the Burning House

Major Jelles Fonda's home · Caughnawaga, 1780

As flames took hold of Major Jelles Fonda's house, the story goes, music began to sound. The home possessed a clock capable of playing several tunes, and the mechanism apparently continued to operate while the building burned. In the later telling, those nearby stopped to listen to an unexpected melody rising from a house under destruction.

The detail survives in historical accounts assembled long after the raid. It makes a powerful image, but it is not a contemporary eyewitness statement in the Tryon County committee minutes. Other embellishments—that listeners interpreted the music as a spirit speaking, or that an elaborate mirror passed from hand to hand among the plunder—should likewise be presented as part of the older narrative rather than as independently witnessed fact.

Whether every detail occurred as later writers described it is less important than what the story conveys. Jelles's house was not simply a building on a battlefield. It contained the possessions and routines of a family, the products of years of trade, and objects that once marked the hours of ordinary life. The music of the clock—if the account is accurate—made the destruction unforgettable.

Source note: Family outline "04_American Independence.html," citing older Mohawk Valley histories; the clock episode has not yet been traced to an independently verified contemporary account.

John and Adam taken prisoner

Other branches of the family faced captivity rather than immediate escape. In the narrative preserved on fonda.org and in the original outline, Adam Douw Fonda was captured near Cayadutta Creek when raiders reached his home. John Douw Fonda, whose imprisonment by the royal sheriff had been documented five years earlier, was also taken. Their houses were reported burned, and both men were carried northward toward Canada among prisoners seized in the raid.

The outline also recounts the danger faced by Margaret Wemple, an innkeeper, and the capture of her son Myndert. It links John Fonda to an attempt to discover the source of her cries for help shortly before he himself was seized. These details come from retrospective histories and have not yet been checked against wartime prisoner lists, depositions, or correspondence. They may be retained as attributed accounts, but they should not be made to sound like passages from a verified day-by-day journal.

Captivity in Canada was not a footnote to the Revolutionary experience. For a family whose earlier story had been shaped by migration across the Atlantic, this was a forced removal under entirely different circumstances. How long John and Adam remained in captivity, how they returned, and which surviving records preserve their names are specific verification gaps to retain for the final reference review. The existing family story establishes the tradition; it does not yet supply a complete documentary itinerary.

The valley after the fires

Raids continued to shape life in the Mohawk region through the later years of the war. Farms had to be rebuilt, trading relationships restored, and displaced families reunited. Some residents had supported Britain and departed; others had fought on the American side but lost property or family members. For Haudenosaunee communities, the conflict brought devastation, division, and displacement on a scale that cannot be represented simply as the backdrop to settler losses.

Major Jelles Fonda's later public career, as summarized in Frey's notes, continued after the war. The original family archive also places him among those involved in landholding farther west in the 1780s. Those postwar developments lead into the next chapter, where the emphasis moves from wartime survival to the movement of families, property, and opportunities across a widening country. They must be considered alongside the dispossession and unequal claims that accompanied that expansion.

For the Fondas, the Revolution was not one episode experienced by one person. Adam helped organize local resistance, Jelles served in military and civic life, John endured two very different confrontations with authority, and Douw died in the destruction of Caughnawaga. The family's experience gives the wider history its human scale: a committee meeting, a farm path, a burning home, a boat across the river, and the uncertainty of who would return.

Source notes and verification gaps

1. The Minute Book of the Committee of Safety of Tryon County, the Old New York Frontier (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1905), introduction by J. Howard Hanson and notes by Samuel Ludlow Frey. Contemporary committee minutes document Adam Fonda's attendance and public duties; pp. 49–51 reproduce testimony in John Fonda's case; Frey's notes, especially pp. 136–137 and notes on Major Jelles Fonda, supply later biographical context.
2. Fonda family editorial outline, "04_American Independence.html," from the archived family-history materials. Used as the main source for the family-specific 1780 raid narrative, including the accounts of Douw, Adam, John, Major Jelles, Penelope Grant, and the musical clock. Its cited histories include *Frontiersmen of New York* and *History of Schoharie County*; the exact editions and page citations remain to be established.
3. The source outline gives family Revolutionary War service totals and casualty figures. These have not been independently tallied from military rolls and are omitted as verified statistics from this draft.
4. Name forms follow the Fonda archive convention. Some apparent middle names are later identifiers, not necessarily names appearing in eighteenth-century records.
5. The language used by 1905 writers, especially descriptions of Indigenous participants and Loyalists, reflects period political perspectives. This chapter distinguishes their narratives from contemporary minutes and avoids adopting their characterizations as settled fact. Illustration: Guy Johnson, "A North View of Fort Johnson," 1759, New York Public Library Digital Gallery; Wikimedia Commons, "Fort Johnson.jpg" (public domain).
6. Further source: Jephtha R. Simms, *The Frontiersmen of New York*, vol. 2, pp. 336–343, especially p. 338, for later accounts of the 1780 raid.

Chapter 5 — A New Nation, a Growing Family

The Revolution ended in treaty and celebration, but for families along the Mohawk it left burned buildings, interrupted trade, absent relatives, and places whose names had become inseparable from loss. In the decades that followed, the Fonda story would no longer be contained within a short stretch of the Hudson and Mohawk rivers. Some descendants remained rooted in eastern and central New York; others began following the roads and waterways into the Great Lakes country. The family's future was becoming geographically wider—and harder to tell through one household alone.

After the war: home, memory, and continuity

The events of 1780, recounted in the preceding chapter, were not easily set aside. Douw Jellis Fonda had died during the Caughnawaga raid, homes and goods had been lost, and members of the family had been carried into captivity. Peace in 1783 removed the immediate military threat, not the consequences of years of insecurity. The next generation inherited both its predecessors' established connections in the Mohawk Valley and the task of making lives in a changed political world.

Here the record is uneven. We can identify members of the extended family and trace some later careers, but the surviving materials do not permit a room-by-room account of rebuilding after the raid. Rather than invent those scenes, the narrative turns to what can be documented: the persistence of family branches in New York and the journeys by which other branches reached settlements to the west.

The family archive's military overview counts Fonda participants in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. These tallies demonstrate continued public involvement but are not a substitute for individual service records; the full roster, ranks, and identification of similarly named men remain matters for the archive's detailed military tables.

The wider map

The United States that emerged in 1783 was itself changing rapidly. New York communities grew along older river corridors while traffic on lakes and inland waterways connected the state more closely with regions around the Great Lakes. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 greatly enlarged the nation's territorial claims, but federal claims did not erase the presence or sovereignty of Native nations. For the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous communities, the decades after independence involved treaty pressure, land loss, and sustained efforts to defend their homelands.

Migration was rarely a clean break. Family members kept associations with parents and siblings left behind; some moved from one settlement to another before choosing a permanent home. For historians, these movements often become visible only in isolated milestones—an arrival date, a marriage record, a military appointment, a land purchase, or a retrospective account. A particularly vivid set of milestones survives for John Henry Fonda.

John Henry Fonda follows the waterways

According to the Fonda archive's "Frontier Exploration" account, John Henry Fonda was born in Watervliet, Albany County, in 1808 and reached Prairie du Chien, in present-day Wisconsin, in 1825. At about seventeen, he had traveled far from the region where his Fonda forebears had lived for generations. Later accounts place him in trading, transport, public service, and military roles. This chapter concentrates on his earliest western journeys; his subsequent career belongs in the chapters covering the more mature frontier and the Civil War.

Prairie du Chien stood where the Wisconsin River approaches the Mississippi, an important meeting point for trade and travel. Fort Dearborn, at the site of modern Chicago, was another small but significant military and commercial post. In Fonda's retrospective account of passing through Chicago in 1825, he described waterways and marshes, a modest collection of buildings, and a place that did not yet resemble the city it would become.



Figure 5.1. Original editorial illustration of an early nineteenth-century river steamboat, used here as a contextual image for the waterborne routes, commercial travel, and river systems that shaped early western movement.

Such reminiscences have strengths and limits. They give a personal voice to experiences often reduced to a date in a family register; they were also recorded after the events and must be read as recollection rather than a diary kept on the journey. We can use Fonda's remembered observations without assuming that every detail can be independently confirmed.

The Mail Bag to Fort Dearborn

Great Lakes country · Winter 1827

In John Henry Fonda's later telling, the assignment began with a question from a United States quartermaster: could he find his way to Chicago? John had already passed through the place and answered that he could try. The journey was no mere errand. Fort Dearborn lay beyond long stretches of difficult winter travel, and the message entrusted to him had to get through.

He chose a Canadian companion named Boiseley. Their burden, as he remembered it, was not an impressive leather satchel but a flat tin container covered with untanned deerhide, holding official dispatches and settlers' letters. The object was small; the distance was not. On the road and along the waterways, the men had to negotiate terrain that changed with the season and depended on their own judgment about the route.

Fonda recalled that they arrived at Fort Dearborn after more than a month. He approached the post, answered the sentry's challenge, and was conducted inside to deliver the letters. Captain Morgan, the officer in command, accepted the dispatches and told him to wait for further orders. Fonda and Boiseley lodged beyond the palisades until the return journey could begin.

The young courier later remembered this episode with obvious satisfaction. One can understand why: his task required endurance and a practical knowledge of country still unfamiliar to many eastern Americans. But its historical value is larger than adventure. Letters and instructions passed from settlement to settlement because people like John Fonda carried them, one difficult mile at a time.

This vignette follows Fonda's retrospective narrative quoted in the source collection cited above. Its dialogue is paraphrased, not reconstructed as contemporary verbatim speech.



Figure 5.2. Original editorial illustration of frontier couriers and scouts overlooking winter Great Lakes country, paired here with John Henry Fonda's remembered journeys through the upper Midwest and toward Fort Dearborn.

A generation choosing different paths

John Henry's departure is not evidence that the family as a whole abandoned the Mohawk Valley. It illustrates something subtler: by the 1820s, the extended family could support several kinds of life at once. Old households and congregations continued in New York, while younger descendants could pursue trade and work in distant posts. Movement did not replace rootedness; the two histories unfolded together.

Another route toward the west would carry Abraham A. Fonda (1803–1871), a member of the Rensselaer County branch, to the Missouri River. His story did not unfold in the same way as John Henry's. Where John Henry crossed a changing frontier as traveler and courier, Abraham entered a struggle over land, transport, and the naming of a town. Both stories show how widely the family's circumstances had diverged by the 1830s.

These ventures should not make the eastern household disappear from view. The Mohawk and Hudson valleys remained a family center even while individual Fondas pursued military appointments, river commerce, and new settlements. The archive's timeline also identifies Henry Adam Fonda (1766–1828) as a New York legislator in 1807, 1816, and 1819 and as a

brigadier general appointed in 1820. Those claims, though deserving original-record verification, remind us that the early republic offered opportunities for public service as well as migration.

Public office and an older home ground

The War of 1812 interrupted the peace won in 1783, bringing renewed conflict along the United States–Canadian border and the Great Lakes. The family archive’s timeline connects Henry Adam Fonda to service during this era and to multiple terms in the New York legislature. We do not yet have a documented day-by-day account of his wartime activity, and the chapter should not invent one. His recorded political and military roles nevertheless offer a counterpoint to the westbound travelers: some of the family’s next generation remained in New York and became involved in its civic institutions.

Family expansion cannot be described by a single direction of travel. A person who remained near the ancestral valley might lead a public life; another, far from home, might become a courier, trader, or land investor. In both cases, the familiar surname had ceased to signify one place or one occupation.

The Missouri River and the Prudhomme tract

In 1838 a tract at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri rivers became the object of a consequential land sale. The property, generally called the Prudhomme tract, offered a useful landing on a river that drew traders, migrants, and speculators. In July, Abraham A. Fonda acquired it at auction for \$1,800. The sale was challenged as irregular and later set aside by the court. A second sale that November brought together investors who paid \$4,220 for the property and organized the Town of Kansas company.

Abraham joined the group of proprietors, but the story was not an uncomplicated success. Contemporary-looking precision in these figures comes from later published Kansas City histories, not from sale deeds we have personally examined. Their accounts place Fonda inside the town-founding circle, while also describing friction among its members. The river landing would become part of Kansas City; Abraham’s preferred place in its name would not survive.



Figure 5.3. Original editorial illustration of a canoe landing on the Missouri frontier, used here as a contextual image for the river-landing and wilderness setting associated with Abraham A. Fonda and the Prudhomme tract.

The Town That Might Have Been Port Fonda

Missouri River · 1838

Before there was a Kansas City, there was a valuable landing and an awkward question: who would own the ground around it? The Prudhomme tract lay where rivers converged and travelers needed a place to unload and begin the overland journey. Abraham A. Fonda, a New Yorker by birth, appeared at the July 1838 auction and obtained the property for \$1,800. The bidding soon became controversial, and the court ordered a new sale.

At the second sale, a company of investors purchased the tract for \$4,220. Fonda was among the proprietors who hoped to turn the landing into a town. The participants had to agree on a name. One proposal—"Port Fonda"—would have put Abraham's surname on the map for generations. Other suggestions, remembered in later histories, included "Kawsmouth," "Rabbitville," and "Possumtrot."

But town-building also involved quarrels. Later Kansas City accounts tell of a dispute between Fonda and Henry Jobe, another interested party. Whatever the personal cause and exact sequence, the proprietors did not choose Port Fonda. They settled instead on the Town of Kansas, named for the river and the Kanza people whose name Europeans had adapted.

Abraham's role was nonetheless real: he stood among the early investors at the moment when a river landing became the foundation of a city. The lost name makes the episode memorable, but its larger meaning lies in the risks, disagreements, and opportunism of the westward land economy. This account follows later local histories and the Fonda archive; it does not assume that every recollected exchange can be independently verified.

This episode closes the chapter's geographical arc, from the Mohawk and Hudson valleys to Prairie du Chien and the Missouri landing. It also supplies a bridge to the next chapter: by 1840, the family was no longer concentrated in the communities where its colonial and Revolutionary history had been made. New branches were establishing themselves far beyond New York.

At the edge of another era

By about 1840, the Fonda family's history had entered a new phase. Its earlier generations had crossed the Atlantic, followed the Mohawk westward, and survived a war fought close to their homes. Later descendants now crossed the Great Lakes country and invested in towns along the Missouri. Others remained in New York and served in its public institutions. Ahead lay a mid-nineteenth-century America of wider settlement, sharpening sectional division, and eventually civil war.

Sources and editorial notes

1. Primary family compilation: "Frontier Exploration," in the Fonda family history materials supplied for this project (the archived family narrative preserved in the archived family-history materials). Dates and biographical claims about John Henry Fonda and Abraham A. Fonda are attributed to that compilation.
2. The compilation cites the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Chicago: *Its History and Its Builders* for John Henry Fonda's reminiscences. Precise original edition and page citations remain to be established at final source review; the account is therefore identified here as retrospective.
3. "American Independence," in the same family compilation, supplies the aggregate Fonda military participation figures and the preceding wartime context. Military numbers are not reproduced here as an independently verified roster.
4. Abraham A. Fonda and the 1838 Prudhomme land sale: Fonda family archive timeline and biographical account, compared with later local historical narratives of early Kansas City. The reported \$1,800 first bid, annulment of the sale, and \$4,220 company purchase are given in published city histories; original court and property papers remain to be checked.
5. Additional comparative sources: Fonda.org timeline (<https://www.fonda.org/timeline.htm>); Fonda Blog, "Life Stories" archive (<https://blog.fonda.org/archives/category/history/life-stories>); Kansas City historical narrative (https://kcrhi.org/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/publications/Kansas_City_Missouri.pdf). These sources are cited as compiled or retrospective narratives, not as independently checked contemporary testimony.
6. Further sources: Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, vol. 5, pp. 205–238; Carrie Westlake Whitney, *Kansas City, Missouri: Its History and Its People, 1808–1908* (1908), pp. 95–96; *The Kansas City Star*, 7 February 1926; State Historical Society of Missouri, Gabriel Prudhomme Estate Abstract (K0209), 1831–1858.

Chapter 6 — A Family Divided: The Civil War Years

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Fonda surname belonged to families far beyond the Mohawk Valley. Descendants had built lives in Illinois, the upper Midwest, and the South. That growing geography created opportunities, but when war came in 1861 it also exposed a profound division: people who shared a surname did not necessarily share a political allegiance.

The Fonda archive estimates that seventy-eight people bearing the surname served in the American Civil War, including ten officers; it lists twelve killed and three serving the Confederacy. These are valuable compilation figures, not a verified muster-roll count for this edition. The accounts that follow are more individual: a surveyor who commanded troops, a young sergeant-major whose wounds proved fatal, an army telegrapher entrusted with a crucial dispatch, and an educator in Mississippi who joined Confederate service.

A surveyor goes to war

John Giles Fonda (1822–1910) was born near the Mohawk River at Sand Flats, Montgomery County, New York. According to the family archive's biographical account, he moved with his parents to Hancock County, Illinois, in 1835, and worked as a surveyor and civil engineer. A small commission in 1850—to help divide the county into townships—placed him squarely in the practical business of making new settlements legible on paper. His work also connected him to railroads and other projects transforming the interior of the country.

John had already served during the Mexican-American War, enlisting in an Illinois mounted company in 1847 and leaving service as a lieutenant. With the outbreak of the Civil War, he entered the 2nd Illinois Cavalry in July 1861. The account traces a rapid progression: major in the 12th Illinois Cavalry, duty at Camp Butler near Springfield, and then, in October 1862, colonel of the 118th Illinois Infantry.

Sent south to Louisiana with his regiment that December, John served in the Vicksburg campaign and was subsequently placed in command of a cavalry brigade. He received the brevet rank of brigadier general. His military experience was not a simple departure from his earlier profession: both surveying and command depended upon terrain, movement, roads, and the ability to turn reports into decisions. That comparison is an interpretation, but the record of his occupations and service is well established in the archive's cited biographies.



Figure 6.1. Original editorial illustration of mounted Civil War service, used here to accompany the career of John Giles Fonda in the Mexican and Civil wars.

North and South, under one surname

The war's alignment cannot be explained by a family pedigree. Anthony Cornelius Fonda (1818–1893), a son of Cornelius Isaac and Alida VanVranken Fonda of the Albany area, graduated from Union College in 1839. He later moved south and settled in Charleston, Mississippi, where he taught, married, raised a family, and served as Tallahatchie County surveyor. The original family essay describes his joining Company I of the 2nd Mississippi Partisan Rangers in 1862 as a sergeant in Confederate service.

Anthony's story makes the geographic consequences of migration particularly clear. He had been born and educated in New York, but his adult community and wartime loyalties lay in Mississippi. His service belongs to the history of a rebellion organized to preserve slavery. The surviving family sketch records his later educational work, including appointment as a county superintendent in 1882; it does not, by itself, explain his private motives for joining the Confederate army. Those motives should not be invented.

The army's fragile lines of communication

The armies moved on railroads and roads, but they also depended upon telegraph wires and messengers. Ten Eyck Hilton Fonda (1838–1923), known as “Nike,” served as a telegraph operator attached to the Union war effort. His experience illustrates a different sort of wartime risk: news could reach an office quickly, yet the final miles to a moving commander might still have to be crossed on horseback.

The Dispatch Before Gettysburg

Frederick, Maryland · June–July 1863

On July 4, 1863, with events at Gettysburg still unfolding, Ten Eyck “Nike” Fonda wrote to his brother Douw Henry about a ride he would remember for the rest of his life. The letter survives in a transcription reproduced by the family archive, and its urgency is plain even after more than a century and a half.

Nike reported that word had reached the War Department that Confederate forces were concentrating near Gettysburg. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton wanted the information conveyed to General George G. Meade. According to Nike, he was chosen to carry the dispatch because the telegraph line had not reached the moving army. He started at about one in the morning under a bright moon, knowing neither the precise location of headquarters nor whether Confederate scouts were on the road.

He drove his horse hard. At Woodburg he stopped briefly to water it; later he encountered a uniformed rider and asked directions. At Middleburg he learned that the army had moved onward, forcing him to search again. He eventually found headquarters and stated that he delivered the message in person and obtained a receipt timed 5:15. Meade, he wrote, furnished a fresh horse and cavalry escort for the return.

Nike’s description of his own excitement is enlivened by an almost comic closing request: his brother was to destroy the letter rather than let their father show it around. He did not want to become “notorious.” The irony is that the letter and a much later 1913 newspaper account kept the ride in the family’s historical memory.

The episode is best understood as Nike’s firsthand account of delivering a consequential dispatch—not proof that one message alone caused the Battle of Gettysburg. The exact movement, recipient, and timing warrant comparison with contemporaneous military and telegraph records before any stronger claim is made.



Figure 6.2. Original editorial illustration of a Civil War dispatch rider, used here to accompany Ten Eyck “Nike” Fonda’s Gettysburg dispatch episode.

A wound that would not heal

Eldert Raymond Fonda, generally appearing in the archive as E. Raymond Fonda (1837–1864), served first in a short-term Vermont enlistment and later in Company H of the 115th New York Infantry. The compiler’s blog post “Civil War Grave Restoration” adds a fuller sketch: born in Watertown, Massachusetts, he appeared in the 1850 and 1860 census in Edinburgh, Saratoga County, and was residing in Cohoes when he entered New York service. Captured at Harper’s Ferry in September 1862, he was soon paroled, promoted to sergeant-major the following month, and eventually mortally wounded in Virginia in May 1864.

The Sergeant-Major Who Gave the Warning

Virginia and New York · May–July 1864

The 115th New York’s account places Sergeant-Major E. Raymond Fonda in a battle near Chester Station, Virginia, on May 7, 1864. The regiment was under fire, and a flanking maneuver threatened its position. In one retelling, Raymond was among the first to notice the danger and called out a warning to his commanding officer.

Other soldiers remembered his willingness to move along the line while bullets flew. The same exposed position that enabled him to see what was happening also placed him in danger. During the fighting he was struck and carried from the field. Later narratives praised his courage; their heroic phrasing reflects comrades' memories rather than an impartial battlefield transcript.

Raymond survived the immediate injuries, but not the months that followed. Accounts preserved in the archive and summarized in the grave-restoration post trace his treatment from a field hospital to Hampton Hospital at Fort Monroe and then to the Ladies' Home Hospital in New York City, where he died on 22 July 1864. He was buried in the John Fonda lot at Albany Rural Cemetery; his headstone and associated marble elements were restored in 2010, giving the story a visible memorial in the present as well as a place in the wartime record.

His experience turns a military statistic into a human story. The family archive's list of wartime deaths includes names and regiments; Raymond's case also preserves the terrible distance between being wounded in battle and dying weeks later. One may survive the day and still not survive the war.



Figure 6.4. Restored gravestone of Eldert Raymond Fonda at Albany Rural Cemetery, Menands, New York. The base bears the epitaph "I have done my duty." Photograph by Civil War historian Mark Bodnar.

The restored stone identifies E. Raymond Fonda, records his death on July 22, 1864, and refers to wounds received at Chesterfield on May 7, 1864. Some lines on the headstone remain illegible; its base reads, "I have done my duty." The epitaph is not documented here as his spoken last words.

Other forms of service

David Bartholomew Fonda (1834–1903) enlisted in Company C of the 89th Illinois Infantry in 1862. The family sketch records that, following the Battle of Perryville, he took charge of an ambulance train and then served in hospital work near Bardstown, Kentucky. He left the army in 1863 and pursued medical training, later practicing in the Chicago area. His path links wartime evacuation and medical need to a civilian vocation that lasted beyond the conflict.

Such lives complicate any single image of “the Civil War soldier.” Some men carried weapons, others organized transport or messages, and others worked where the wounded arrived. Women, children, and families endured the uncertainty of absence and bereavement; the present sources offer much more about Fonda men’s recorded service than about those left at home. That imbalance is a limitation of the surviving account, not evidence that their experiences mattered less.



Figure 6.3. Original editorial illustration of a Civil War field hospital and surgeon at work, used here to accompany Dr. Smith Fonda and wartime medical service. Modern AI-generated historical interpretation based on earlier black-and-white reference material.

The war’s long aftermath

The archive says John Giles Fonda returned to civilian life after the war, settling on a farm near Fountain Green in 1866 and eventually resuming engineering and public responsibilities. Anthony Cornelius Fonda remained in Mississippi and worked in education. David Bartholomew Fonda entered medicine. Raymond did not come home.

War had carried relatives with the same surname along diverging courses, some into Union regiments and some into Confederate ranks. The story also cannot end with uniforms and

battlefield honors. Emancipation and the legal destruction of slavery altered the country, while the families' records preserve traces of slavery and freedom in the wider Fonda-associated archive. Those lives, including those of Black individuals bearing related surnames, require their own careful treatment in the next chapter rather than an assumption that a surname alone establishes descent.

Source notes

1. Primary basis: "Civil War," "Southern Hospitality," and "Emancipation" sections in the compiler's original Fonda Family in America archive (historical HTML materials bundled with the project). The text here follows those accounts, with narrative interpretation identified as such.
2. John Giles Fonda: archive citations include Illinois in the 19th Century, 118th Illinois Infantry Regiment, and Civil War High Commands; check individual rank and assignment dates against service records before final publication.
3. E. Raymond Fonda: archive quotes 115th New York regimental histories, New York State Military Museum material, and the compiler's blog entry "Civil War Grave Restoration," which also summarizes his service, wounding at Chesterfield Heights, hospital transfers, death in New York City, and the 2010 restoration of his grave marker.
4. Nike Fonda: the long 4 July 1863 letter appears in archive transcription; its separate 1913 Omaha retelling must not be treated as contemporary confirmation of claims about the Battle of Gettysburg.
5. The "78 served / 10 officers / 12 killed / 3 Confederate" figures are an archive tally pending independent reconciliation, not presented as a definitive official count.
6. Eldert Raymond Fonda gravestone, Albany Rural Cemetery: photograph by Civil War historian Mark Bodnar, reproduced with permission from the Fonda family archive. The restoration is described in the Fonda Blog, "Civil War Grave Restoration" (30 August 2010). The headstone is partially illegible; reading of the epitaph is based on the supplied photograph and compiler's partial transcription.
7. Further source: Alfred Theodore Andreas, History of Cook County, Illinois, p. 756. Military service citations are also collected in the Fonda.org Wars & Service research section.

Chapter 7 — Farms, Railroads and Cities

The Civil War had divided the nation and left families across the country with losses that no census could measure. Yet it did not halt the quieter movement of households onto new farms, along expanding railroads, and into towns where a merchant's reputation might become as visible as a family name on a farmhouse door. For the extended Fonda family, the late nineteenth century was marked less by one common journey than by several different ways of making a living.

Many stories in this chapter began before 1865. That is part of the point: migration did not begin or end with a national milestone. A farm established before the war might shape children's lives decades later. A teenager who arrived in Colorado in 1874 could build a career that stretched well into the next century. The family history recorded these trajectories through county biographies, reminiscences, census entries, and local histories; each type of source reveals some details better than others.

A road west, twenty-three days long

In the spring of 1838 Cornelius C. Fonda, originally of New York, traveled to Calhoun County, Michigan, with his wife Esther Moe and their three sons. According to the biographical account preserved in the family archive, they followed the Hudson by steamer, the Erie Canal to Buffalo, another boat to Detroit, and finally crossed Michigan by wagon with a double ox team. The journey took twenty-three days. Its date falls outside the main years of this chapter, but the journey is the necessary beginning of the Michigan family story.

His brother William Cornelius Fonda had arrived in Calhoun County in 1835 and acquired unimproved land in Pennfield Township. The archive presents William as an energetic farmer and local militia officer. For both men, the move was less a break with New York than an extension of the household economy into land that required clearing, fencing, and cultivation. Their later descendants grew up in communities made possible by these earlier decisions.

Twenty-Three Days to Michigan

The Cornelius C. Fonda household · Spring 1838

A steamer on the Hudson, a canal boat bound toward Buffalo, another vessel for Detroit, and finally an ox-drawn wagon: the stages of Cornelius C. Fonda's journey read almost like an inventory of the transportation systems that remade the northern states. The family account says twenty-three days passed between departure and arrival. The travelers were not solitary adventurers. Cornelius went with Esther Moe Fonda and their three sons, carrying the practical needs of a household toward a place that was still unfamiliar.

The last stage was perhaps the most telling. Once the waterways ended, a double ox team carried the family across Michigan. The canal made long-distance movement possible; it did not build a house, plant a field, or make a new community feel like home. Those tasks awaited them after the road ended.

The account tells us what conveyances the family used and how long the trip took, but not what they said at each stop or how the boys felt when they finally arrived. Those silences are part of the historical record. Even so, the precise sequence of steamer, canal, boat, and wagon captures the threshold between an eastern home and a new life in the Midwest.

Source: the Cornelius C. Fonda entry in the original “Heartland” chapter of the Fonda family archive, quoting an older Calhoun County biographical history.

An Iowa farm becomes an inheritance

Other branches went farther. Robert Mitchell Fonda, born in New York in 1824, moved with his family to Clayton County, Iowa, in 1855. He first located near Monona and, in 1864, purchased a farm of 256 acres. An 1882 county history described him as a farmer and dairyman and placed his household among the established residents of Monona Township. The land, not a spectacular single event, forms the center of his story.

The Iowa farm illustrates how migration and settlement unfolded over generations. By the 1880s the word “pioneer” in local histories often signaled a family’s claim to permanence and achievement, even when the same ground had a much longer Indigenous history. The book should preserve both truths: the work and persistence of arriving families, and the fact that expansion took place on lands with prior inhabitants and claims.



Figure 7.1. Modern interpretive illustration of a westbound wagon journey, used as contextual art for the family’s nineteenth-century migration; not a depiction of a documented Fonda expedition.

The railroad changes the work

Railways created careers as well as routes. The archive identifies Erwin Roselle Fonda (1844–1919) as a Civil War veteran who later became a railroad engineer with the Union Pacific,

working from the Omaha area by 1881. His path connects two chapters of the family story: military service in the 1860s and the demanding technical labor of a growing railway system afterward.

A separate biographical sketch of Henry A. Fonda, born in the village of Fonda, tells of a long managerial career on eastern railroads. He began with engineering work on the Utica and Syracuse line, took assignments on the Erie and other railways, and later supervised lines for the Delaware and Hudson system. The sketch eventually places him in banking and stock farming near Milton, Pennsylvania. These are career claims from a retrospective account, not a payroll chronology checked here against each railroad's records.



Figure 7.2. Modern interpretive illustration of nineteenth-century railroad expansion, accompanying the careers of Erwin Roselle Fonda and Henry A. Fonda; not a portrait of either man.

The contrast is revealing. Farming required long-term investment in a specific tract; railroad work demanded mobility, mechanical knowledge, and coordination across a changing network. Both kinds of work could sustain branches of the same extended family, but their daily rhythms were very different.

A small box of belongings in Boulder

George Farrell Fonda (1859–1943) made a different kind of beginning. The family archive reproduces a memoir-like account from *Biographies of Denver and Vicinity*: as a teenager he reached Boulder, Colorado, in May 1874 after traveling by rail through Denver. His brother Giles already operated a drug and stationery business there. George had few possessions and initially worked for ten dollars a month and board. Before long he became involved in the store and its trade.

A Tobacco Box on Pearl Street

George Farrell Fonda · Boulder, Colorado, 1874

The family's Colorado account is unusually generous with small details. George Farrell Fonda arrived in Denver with a little money, then continued toward Boulder. When he walked from the depot, he carried his belongings in a square wooden tobacco box. His destination was not an unknown mining claim but the store of his brother Giles, whom he had not seen in eight years.

The brothers recognized one another immediately, the account says. Giles had a drug and stationery business, and George went to work for ten dollars a month and board. At first the young newcomer slept on the floor with the dog for company. This is the kind of humble, concrete detail that rarely survives in a census entry and makes the difference between a business chronology and a life story.

George gradually learned the business as the brothers' interests shifted between Boulder and Leadville. The archive says he remained connected with the Pearl Street premises for decades. The arriving boy with the tobacco box thus became part of the city's commercial history. It was not a story of overnight fortune, but of a family connection turned into a livelihood through daily work.

Source: "Westward Ho!" in the original Fonda family archive, quoting Biographies of Denver and Vicinity. The passage is a later reminiscence, not a verbatim 1874 diary.

A family takes root in many places

By the close of the nineteenth century, Fonda households lived across an American geography that would have been difficult for their seventeenth-century ancestors to imagine. The family archive follows farmers in Wisconsin and Iowa, merchants in Colorado, and men whose professional work carried them through railroad towns and growing cities. These branches did not all become prosperous, nor did they share identical opportunities.

This widening world also complicates the meaning of a family name. A name could appear in county histories and business directories, on a country road or a city storefront, and later in records far removed from New York. The family's story was no longer located chiefly along the Hudson and Mohawk. It was becoming a collection of regional histories held together by kinship, naming, and the work of preservation.

Sources and editorial notes

1. Primary family compilation: "11_Heartland.html" in the archived family-history materials. The entries for Cornelius C. Fonda, William Cornelius Fonda, Robert Mitchell Fonda, Erwin Roselle Fonda, and others provide the biographical framework used here.

2. The Cornelius and William migration accounts are attributed in the legacy archive to regional biographical histories of Calhoun County, Michigan. Exact editions, page citations, and individual genealogy links warrant review before final publication.
3. Robert Mitchell Fonda's Iowa biography is attributed by the archive to History of Clayton County, Iowa (1882), Monona Township, pp. 1040–1041. The chapter relies on the archive's excerpt rather than an independently checked scan.
4. "10_Westward Ho.html" supplies the George Farrell Fonda account, attributed to Biographies of Denver and Vicinity. Details of the Boulder store and 1874 arrival are presented as retrospective recollections.
5. "05_Frontier Exploration.html" gives Henry A. Fonda's railroad-management sketch, later-life farming, and banking activities. His individual birth/death identification and connection to earlier Henrys require the same caution applied elsewhere in the book.
6. Editorial scope: Some migration events began in the 1830s and 1850s; they are included here as origins of the families and careers that matured after the Civil War. The chapter does not claim that all listed descendants were direct members of one household.
7. Further source: Henry B. Peirce, History of Calhoun County, Michigan (L. H. Everts & Co.), pp. 82, 176.

Chapter 8 — New Century, New Directions

At the start of the twentieth century, descendants of Jelle and Hester Fonda's New Netherland household were living in communities far removed from the upper Hudson. The family story no longer followed a single road west. Some continued in agriculture and small-town businesses; others entered law, science, advertising, public service, and corporate employment. The next generation carried an old surname into professional settings unfamiliar to its seventeenth-century forebears.

As railroads and cities changed the country, opportunities multiplied and family careers diversified. This chapter stays with individuals identified in the Dutch-American Fonda genealogical compilation, drawing its examples from the archive rather than treating every appearance of the surname as evidence of shared ancestry.

From a Missouri farm to a law practice

The career of Anthony Phillip Fonda (1878–1935), as recorded in the family compilation's Heartland section, shows how varied a single life could become. Born in Leavenworth, Kansas, he was raised in a family that crossed the borders between farming, business, and public service. His education took him through public schools, a military academy, technical studies in Cleveland, and Union College in Schenectady. The biographical sketch presents him as energetic and determined, but its favorable language is that of a later local biography and should be read accordingly.

When the Spanish-American War began, Anthony sought military service but was turned down on physical grounds. He instead went to Cuba on business for a meat-packing concern. Returning to Missouri, he purchased an eighty-acre farm known as Avondale in Clay County, where he raised lima beans and sweet potatoes. While still involved in agriculture, he began reading law in local offices. He was admitted to the bar in 1903, then spent a period as a railway claim agent before concentrating on land and real-estate matters, particularly taxation.

There is an important distinction between the early family tradition of landholding and Anthony's more specialized twentieth-century work. A tract of farmland could now be the beginning of a professional career. It could also be an asset that rose in value as markets, transportation, and the nearby city changed.

Eighty Acres and a Law Book

Anthony Phillip Fonda · Missouri, c. 1900–1903

The young man who had hoped to serve in the Spanish-American War was rejected for military duty. His path nevertheless took him to Cuba, representing a packing company in the unsettled years surrounding the conflict. When he came home, he turned toward land rather than an army commission.

Avondale was an eighty-acre farm in Clay County. Beans and sweet potatoes were ordinary crops, demanding ordinary, repetitive work. But the biographical account records something less ordinary: while engaged in farming, Anthony studied law in the offices of Leo Bock and Judge J. V. C. Carnes. The field and the law book belonged to the same years of his life.

In 1903 he was admitted to the bar. The same account says that he sold the farm at a substantial increase over its purchase price and later worked as a railway claim agent before specializing in land and taxes. The figures and character judgments in that account deserve checking against property and court records. Yet its broad outline is clear: Anthony used one occupation as a bridge to another, in an economy where agriculture and legal commerce increasingly met.

Source: Fonda family archive, “11_Heartland.html,” drawing on a later Missouri biographical sketch of Anthony Phillip Fonda. This is an attributed account, not a reconstructed contemporary diary.



Farm life, professions, and the changing shape of work

Farming remained important, even as many relatives moved into business and the professions. The archive’s Heartland section traces farms and landholdings in Iowa, Michigan, and other states, while its later career accounts describe the growth of salaried work, laboratory research, advertising, and corporate management. These developments did not occur on a single timetable. A family member might move from agriculture to a professional practice, or from an upstate New York community to metropolitan employment, without severing older family ties.



Figure 8.1. Original editorial illustration of an early twentieth-century Midwestern farm. A contextual interpretation, not a documented Fonda property or family photograph.

New records help trace these directions. Census schedules, directories, technical publications, and local histories supply more occupational detail than many earlier sources. They must still be read carefully: a recorded residence describes a particular time, and a professional achievement described in later biography needs a source of its own. The archive makes these careers visible while also indicating where more precise documentation would be useful.

Advertising, chemistry, and public service

Douw Henry Fonda (1877–1941), born in Gloversville, New York, represents one such departure from the earlier family world of farms and trading posts. The archive lists him as a Columbia University graduate and founder of the Fonda-Haupt Company, an advertising enterprise. It also records twelve years of service on the Plandome village board of trustees and four years as mayor. These details trace the combination of commercial initiative and local public service that characterized some twentieth-century careers, although the brief sketch does not supply dates for every appointment.

Other descendants moved into technical and scientific work. Gorton R. Fonda (1884–1973), identified in the archive as a research chemist, spent nearly forty years with the General Electric laboratory. A 1923 scientific publication is cited in his biographical entry; his later defense-related work falls outside the period of this chapter. Howard Breese Fonda (1896–1964), born in New Rochelle, New York, later became an executive in the pharmaceutical industry. His subsequent leadership roles belong to the middle decades of the century, but his emergence from the New York branch points toward a new kind of professional family history.



Figure 8.2. Original editorial illustration of a growing American city, used as a contextual visual for the changing occupations and communities of Dutch-American Fonda descendants. It is not a depiction of a particular family-owned business.

An Advertising Man in Village Government

Douw Henry Fonda · New York, early twentieth century

Douw Henry Fonda was born in Gloversville in 1877, in a region where the surname had long been familiar. By the early twentieth century, the world of work available to his generation had changed. He went on to study at Columbia University, and the family archive identifies him as a founder of the Fonda-Haupt Company, an advertising business. The surviving summary gives the outlines of the career, though not the day-to-day workings of his firm.

His work also led into municipal affairs. The archive records twelve years of service on the board of trustees of Plandome, on Long Island, followed by four years as mayor. That sequence describes a form of service quite different from the colonial committees and wartime offices encountered in earlier chapters: the ongoing business of a twentieth-century village, where decisions about community life were made through elected or appointed local institutions.

We do not have a contemporary diary telling us how he balanced business and government, or precisely what persuaded him to serve. We can nevertheless follow a verifiable outline in the family compilation: a Gloversville upbringing, university education, a venture in advertising, and sustained participation in local affairs. In one career, the family's story had moved from the Mohawk country into metropolitan commerce and civic administration.

Source: Fonda family archive, "16_Freedom and Prosperity.html," biographical entry for Douw Henry Fonda. Dates and offices are reproduced as attributed archival claims, not independently reconstructed from municipal minutes.

A familiar name enters a new century

The family's paths also approached the arts and national popular culture. Henry Jaynes Fonda, born in Grand Island, Nebraska, in 1905, would eventually become an actor known internationally. His childhood belongs to this period; his stage and film career merits fuller treatment in a later chapter. Together with the changing professional lives traced here, his emergence shows how far the documented family's geographical and occupational horizon had widened.

By 1930, the descendants of the colonial Fonda family included farmers, businesspeople, public servants, laboratory scientists, and people on the threshold of careers in entertainment. The economic crisis beginning in 1929, followed by another world war, would alter many of their plans. Those experiences belong to the chapters ahead.

Sources and editorial notes

1. Primary compilation: "11_Heartland.html" in the supplied Fonda Family in America archive. The Anthony Phillip Fonda sketch records his education, attempted enlistment in 1898, work in Cuba,

Avondale farm, law studies, 1903 admission, and subsequent real-estate interests. Its language and monetary figures are those of a later biographical source, not independently rechecked here.

2. “16_Freedom and Prosperity.html” in the supplied family archive profiles Douw Henry Fonda, Gorton R. Fonda, and Howard Breese Fonda. Their birth dates, career summaries, and cited professional details are treated as archival statements pending full source verification.
3. “14_Hollywood.html” in the supplied archive identifies Henry Jaynes Fonda’s birth in Nebraska in 1905 and summarizes his later career. The details of that career are reserved for a later chapter.
4. Figures 8.1–8.2 are modern editorial color illustrations. Figure 8.1 evokes Midwestern agriculture; Figure 8.2 evokes the changing cities and professional workplaces of the early twentieth century. Neither depicts a documented named family property.
5. Editorial scope: This chapter concentrates on the Dutch-American line documented in the Fonda genealogical archive, c. 1900–1930. Careers that extend beyond the period are noted only as transitions. Matching surnames from otherwise unconnected genealogies are outside the scope of this e-book.

Chapter 9 — Through Two World Wars

By the opening of the 1930s, the extended Fonda family had already spread from its New York origins into farms, factories, laboratories, shops, and professional offices around the country. The Depression and a second world war brought new pressures. But the family record also reveals something less obvious than battle itself: a growing variety of skills through which individual Fondas served, from ordnance and field artillery to radar and medicine.

This chapter continues only the Dutch-American Fonda family history, following named individuals in the archive. It does not assume that every family member's wartime experience was typical, or that an aggregate service count tells us the particulars of a single life.

The family across a troubled decade

The Great Depression affected employment, agriculture, and business across the United States, but the family compilation does not provide detailed Depression-era accounts for the individual Fonda households considered here. We can describe the circumstances in which people lived and identify recorded occupations without inventing a lost job, a foreclosed farm, or a particular family's response.

Life on the Home Front: The Depression Years

The market collapse of 1929 was followed by years in which prices, wages, and employment could change with startling speed. Farmers across the country faced low prices for their produce and, in many areas, debts that were increasingly difficult to meet. Shopkeepers relied on customers who had less to spend; manufacturers confronted shrinking orders; and families weighing a change of residence or employment did so in a climate of uncertainty. These were national conditions, not specific hardships established for any particular Fonda household by the records available for this chapter.

For the Fonda family, the occupations documented in the surrounding decades reveal how widely its members' circumstances had diverged. Agriculture remained part of the family story, but so did small business, law, advertising, industrial research, and work that required specialized training. The earlier chapter followed Anthony Phillip Fonda from management of a Missouri farm into law and real estate; he died in 1935. His recorded career illustrates the range of activities in which a family member could be engaged, although his biographical sketch does not establish how the Depression affected his income, clients, property holdings, or household.

Douw Henry Fonda's advertising enterprise and his service in Plandome village government suggest a different setting: a professional business owner taking part in the civic life of a New York community. Gorton R. Fonda's long career in General Electric's research laboratory represents another avenue, in which technical expertise rather than agricultural land provided continuity of employment. The family archive identifies these careers, but offers no reliable account of what their owners earned or sacrificed during the 1930s. Neither security nor hardship should be inferred simply from a job title.

Such contrasts help explain why the Depression cannot be told as a single Fonda experience. Relatives living in different states and engaged in different kinds of work would have encountered the same national crisis from very different positions. Churches, local associations, extended families, and public relief programs formed parts of the broader American response; whether—and how—particular Fonda households relied on them remains a question for future evidence, not a story to be filled in by assumption.

By the end of the decade, world events were beginning to pull attention from domestic recovery toward the possibility of another war. The transition was not instantaneous: the farming, commercial, scientific, and professional lives described here continued alongside the growing demands of national defense. The same extended family that had built businesses and careers in peacetime would soon appear in records of ordnance, naval engineering, artillery, and military medicine.

One thread runs from the First World War into the Second. Edward Seeley Fonda, born in South Dakota in 1894, enlisted as a private in December 1913 and received his second-lieutenant commission in November 1917. He left continuous service in 1919, only to return to active duty in November 1941. The family archive preserves his official retirement order dated October 29, 1953, a remarkable later document tracing assignments across decades and theaters. Some of his later Korean War service lies beyond this chapter's period, but the record helps place his wartime responsibilities in a longer career.



Figure 9.1. Original interpretive color illustration of soldiers embarking by ship, evoking the military transport of the world-war years; it is not a depiction of a documented Fonda voyage.

War on a widening scale

The compiler's military summary records fourteen Fonda participants in World War I and eighty in World War II; those figures are archival tallies, not an independently audited roster. The World War II summary also lists thirteen officers, two prisoners of war, and four killed. Individual biographies and service documents are more revealing than totals, and some recorded status details require reconciliation with official military files.

Edward's work involved the unglamorous mechanisms by which armies functioned: ordnance, maintenance, depots, training, and command support. Among the posts later listed in his 1953 retirement order were a division maintenance assignment and command of an ordnance service battalion. Those details resist the familiar tendency to equate wartime contribution only with combat at the front.

Radar at sea

Gilbert Cadwallader Fonda (1911–2002), a Princeton mechanical-engineering graduate, served in the United States Navy during World War II, rising to lieutenant commander. His Princeton class memorial describes him as a radar specialist and assistant navigator aboard the aircraft carrier Midway. This is an account preserved by classmates decades after the war, not a ship's contemporary log; it nonetheless reveals how radio electronics and navigation had become essential military fields.

After the war, Gilbert established Operational Radar Services and worked as a consultant on maritime radar and navigation. His later book, *Marine Radar and How to Use It*, belonged to the same technological world. His life thus links wartime innovation with the expanding civilian professions of the postwar era.

A New Language at Sea

Gilbert Cadwallader Fonda · United States Navy · 1940s

For a sailor, a coastline was once read from a familiar combination of charts, bearings, lights, weather, and the eye. The Second World War placed a new instrument in that world. Radar could find distant objects beyond ordinary sight, but someone still had to interpret what the instrument showed and make decisions from the information.

Gilbert Fonda brought an engineer's training into naval service. According to his Princeton class memorial, he became a radar expert and served as an assistant navigator aboard the carrier Midway. The precise conversations on its bridge have not been preserved in the family account, so none need be invented. What matters is the nature of the responsibility: ships and crews now depended not only on seamanship but on rapidly developing electronics.

His work did not end with the war. He built a professional life around radar and marine navigation and eventually wrote a manual for other mariners. In his case, the technology of a world war became the business of peace. The story illustrates how far the Fonda family's occupations had moved from the trading rooms, farms, and mills of its earlier generations.

A winter in the Ardennes

The best-documented captivity episode in the World Wars chapter concerns James Roberts Fonda (1915–2003), born in Troy, New York. After an early career with the Burroughs Corporation, he entered Army service. The archive identifies him with field artillery of the 106th Infantry Division near St. Vith, Belgium, when the German counteroffensive began in December 1944.

A Troy Record item dated December 13, 1945, describes him as a former battery commander of a 105-mm howitzer battalion and a prisoner of war of the Germans. It reports his separation from service as a captain and mentions the Purple Heart and campaign decorations. A later obituary says he was captured during the Battle of the Bulge and remained a prisoner until the war's end. The obituary further refers to an unsuccessful American effort to liberate the camp. Exact prisoner movements and camp dates deserve comparison with wartime military records; those details are not asserted more precisely here.



Figure 9.2. Original interpretive color illustration of military personnel in a wartime field camp. Contextual scene only, not a portrait of James Roberts Fonda or a view of his prisoner-of-war camp.

The Battery Commander Who Did Not Come Home at Christmas

James Roberts Fonda · Ardennes · December 1944

The orders and maps of an artillery unit did not promise a quiet December in Belgium. James Roberts Fonda was serving with the 106th Infantry Division as German forces launched the offensive remembered as the Battle of the Bulge. His family's later account places his capture in that campaign.

The archive does not preserve a personal diary of the moment he became a prisoner. It does, however, carry a December 1945 newspaper report, written after he was home, identifying him as a former battery commander and a prisoner of the Germans. His later obituary supplies the family memory of captivity lasting until the war's closing months, despite attempts by American troops to reach the camp.

For his family, what mattered was not a perfectly reconstructed military itinerary but the difference between the man sent overseas and the one finally returned. In 1945 a newspaper could announce his discharge, his decorations, and his visits to family. The ordinary language of reunion stands in sharp contrast to the uncertainty that must have accompanied news of the German offensive.

James resumed his career with Burroughs after the war, ultimately working for the company for decades. Captivity had interrupted his civilian future; it had not brought that future to an end. The later working life is part of the wartime story too.



Care beyond the firing line

Not all wartime specialists worked with weapons or radio equipment. Maxwell Peterson Fonda (born 1913), identified in the compiler's military chapter as a physician, served as a U.S. Army flight surgeon with the 57th Fighter Group, 65th Squadron, in North Africa and Italy. This service claim comes from the family archive and its cited National World War II Memorial entry. Precise dates and operational details would require unit records. Here his presence represents another expanding professional role within military service: caring for aircrews whose missions depended on fitness, survival, and medical judgment.

After the armistice

By 1945, members of the extended family had seen military service, captivity, advanced engineering, logistics, and medical care. Their experiences did not erase the older family pursuits of business, education, and farming; rather, they widened the range of work carried into the postwar years. Gilbert's radar career and James's return to Burroughs provide two concrete examples of that transition.

The next chapter can look more closely at the family's public visibility, including the career of Henry Jaynes Fonda, whose film work rose to national prominence during these decades. That story belongs alongside, but need not replace, the quieter experiences of relatives whose contributions appeared in service orders, professional memorials, and hometown newspapers.

Sources and editorial notes

1. Fonda family compilation, "World Wars" (13_World Wars.html), supplied in the legacy Fonda Family in America archive. This chapter is the principal source for the names, service summaries, biographical extracts, and aggregate military tallies reported here.
2. Edward Seeley Fonda: retirement announcement, General Orders No. 132, Headquarters, the Armored Center, Fort Knox, 29 October 1953; transcribed in the family compilation. The order is later than the events described but contains a career chronology.

3. Gilbert Cadwallader Fonda: Princeton University Class of 1932 memorial reproduced in the family compilation. Later professional activities are included only to illuminate the wartime-to-postwar transition.
4. James Roberts Fonda: Troy Record, “Capt. James R. Fonda Receives Discharge,” 13 December 1945, and later family obituary, both quoted in the compilation. Captivity location and sequence warrant direct archival comparison in the final citation pass.
5. Maxwell Peterson Fonda: service summary and referenced National World War II Memorial record in the family compilation. Unit details have not been independently audited for this draft.
6. Civilian life and the Depression: the named careers of Anthony Phillip Fonda, Douw Henry Fonda, and Gorton R. Fonda follow the family compilation's “Heartland” and “Freedom and Prosperity” sections, as summarized in Chapter 8. National conditions in 1929–1941 provide historical context; the available family materials do not document individual Depression-era losses, relief payments, or household finances.
7. Figures 9.1–9.2 are interpretive modern scenes, not verified Fonda photographs.

Chapter 10 — Modern Times, Lasting Roots

The Second World War ended, but it did not end the Fonda family's habit of taking different paths. In the second half of the twentieth century, its descendants were found in research laboratories and corporate offices, in churches and local organizations, and on cinema screens watched far beyond the United States. Some of these lives are unusually visible; others survive in the family record as a collection of positions held, places lived, and work performed. Together they extend the story begun centuries earlier in the Hudson and Mohawk valleys.

This chapter follows people explicitly identified in the Dutch-American Fonda archive. It does not assume that every person sharing the surname belongs to this line. Nor does it treat familiar national history as evidence that a particular household experienced events in a particular way.

A changing home ground

Postwar prosperity and increased mobility altered American communities. Roads, universities, medical centers, manufacturing firms, and expanding professional networks created new ways to live and work. The archive does not establish where every descendant settled after 1945; its biographies nevertheless show a family no longer associated with a single occupation, region, or public role.



Figure 10.1. Original interpretive color illustration of a midcentury American neighborhood. It represents the setting of postwar mobility, not a documented Fonda home.

A family name on stage and screen

Henry Jaynes Fonda (1905–1982), born in Grand Island, Nebraska, became one of the best-known members of the extended family. His work ranged from stage productions to films that placed him in dramas about conscience, justice, public duty, and conflict. The family archive singles out *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), and *On Golden Pond* (1981), as well as his Academy and Tony honors. His fame offered a public version of the Fonda name very different from the courthouse minutes, baptismal registers, and farms that dominate the first chapters of this book.

Henry's children Jane Seymour Fonda (born 1937) and Peter Seymour Fonda (1939–2019) pursued performing careers of their own. Jane appeared in major films including *Klute* (1971), *Coming Home* (1978), and *On Golden Pond* (1981), the latter with her father. Peter's screen career and his involvement in the changing film culture of the 1960s brought another sort of recognition. Bridget Jane Fonda (born 1964), Peter's daughter, continued the family's visibility in film in a later generation. These careers deserve recognition here without allowing celebrity to overshadow the very different lives of relatives outside the entertainment business.

Hollywood Looks Back to the Mohawk Valley

Henry and Jane Fonda · 1939–1986

*When Henry Fonda starred in the 1939 film *Drums Along the Mohawk*, he played a fictional settler in the Revolutionary-era valley where earlier generations of his own family had lived. The film was adapted from Walter D. Edmonds's historical novel, not from the life of Douw "the Patriot" Fonda. Yet a December 1947 National Safety Council article, "Stars in Action-Packed Film," explicitly linked the actor's ancestry to the Mohawk Valley and its remembered Revolutionary struggles.*

*That connection was more than a coincidence of a film location. In May 1977, the Syracuse Herald-American reported that Henry had been asked to help publicize a bicentennial reenactment of the Battle of Oriskany, organized by the Tryon County Militia. The organizers welcomed his support and recalled his earlier role in *Drums Along the Mohawk*. The article documents his participation in the commemorative effort, not that he physically fought in the staged battle.*

The interest continued into the next generation. According to the Fonda family archive, Jane Fonda visited the Montgomery County Department of History and Archives in 1980, around the commemoration of her father's seventy-fifth birthday. A contemporary report of that visit has not yet been located, so the date and circumstances remain attributed to the archive rather than independently confirmed here.

*Across the Atlantic, Frisian genealogist D. J. van der Meer published "De Fryske ôfstamming fan myn fiere efternicht Jane Fonda" in the *Genealogysk Jierboekje* of 1986. The article traced a proposed Frisian ancestry for Jane, connecting the immigrant Jelle Douwes to the family of Douwe Everts in Eagum. Van der Meer reconstructed the latter family extensively, but the*

decisive record proving Jelle to be Douwe's son was missing. The proposed relationship therefore remains a hypothesis, not an established pedigree.

Between a Hollywood film, a Revolutionary commemoration, a visit to a county archive, and research in Friesland, an old family geography came back into view. The striking story is not celebrity alone. It is that descendants could look back toward the Mohawk Valley—and beyond it to Eagum—with the same curiosity that animates the broader Fonda archive.



Work beyond the headlines

The contemporary portion of the original archive also documents achievements less familiar to the general public. Gorton R. Fonda's long career as a research chemist at General Electric, including work connected to wartime radar-screen development, is an example of science with consequences beyond the laboratory. Howard Breese Fonda held senior responsibilities in pharmaceutical manufacturing and professional organizations. The postwar decades also included executives such as Jere Williams Fonda in farm-equipment supply and Avery Hunt Fonda in finance. Their biographies differ in detail and source quality, but each illustrates the increasing specialization of family occupations.

These examples carry forward an important theme of the preceding chapters: professional life was no longer simply the exception to farming and trade. It had become one of the ordinary directions in which different Fonda branches could grow. The source collection often records these careers retrospectively, through obituaries, directories, professional notices, and biographies; precise details should be verified against the original publications before final release.

Service, dissent, and the Vietnam era

The United States' involvement in Vietnam produced sharply different experiences within families and across the country. The Fonda archive records service by several men bearing the surname during the era and identifies Peter Francis Fonda (1945–1968), of the New York family, as having died in South Vietnam. His record is not the same as that of actor Peter Seymour Fonda. The similarity of names underscores why identifying dates, parents, places, and military units matters in genealogy.

Jane Fonda's opposition to the war became a major part of her public identity. Her 1972 trip to Hanoi drew particularly intense criticism, including from veterans and prisoners of war and their families; she later expressed regret for aspects of that visit. Her activism should be addressed as part of the historical record, neither confused with the military service of others sharing the surname nor used to presume a single family position on a divisive war.

A vocation of service

Donald Albert Fonda Jr. (1938–2008) represents a very different form of public life. According to the compiler's archive, he studied history and theology and was ordained as an American Baptist minister in 1966. Over a 35-year ministry he served churches in several northeastern states; his

later volunteer activities included housing and refugee-assistance organizations. The source gives a professional outline, not a detailed diary of sermons, congregations, or private motivations. Even so, its evidence is sufficient to establish a sustained vocation involving community institutions and direct service to others.

◆

A Calling Beyond One Town

Donald Albert Fonda Jr. · Ordained 1966

A minister's career can be harder to picture than that of a film actor. The archive does not preserve a stage curtain, a famous scene, or a box-office figure for Donald Albert Fonda Jr. Instead it names schools, congregations, and years of work. He completed a history degree and graduate divinity training before beginning his ordained ministry in western New York in 1966.

The ensuing decades took him through churches in Connecticut, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. His later service included volunteering with Habitat for Humanity and an organization supporting refugees and immigrants. The places in that list were not scenes in a single dramatic episode; they were settings for a career spent among changing communities.

The record does not entitle us to invent a particular conversation with a parishioner or a decisive turning point in his calling. What it does show is enough: the Fonda family's modern history includes people whose work was measured not chiefly in public recognition, but in continuing obligations to other people.

◆

Continuity without sameness

By the end of the twentieth century, the family was too varied for one emblematic occupation or one region to describe it. Film and theater provided its most public names; corporate, scientific, medical, religious, and military occupations supplied much of its quieter history. Those strands were not competing definitions of the family. They were the consequence of generations of movement, education, labor, and change.



Figure 10.2. Original interpretive color illustration of a late-twentieth-century community gathering. It is a period-setting illustration, not a photograph of a particular Fonda event.

The family archive itself has become a new chapter in that history. Its ability to connect people separated by centuries and geography depends on the same disciplined distinctions that guided the earlier narrative: one should separate documentary fact from tradition, identify names carefully, preserve variant spellings, and acknowledge relationships that remain unproved. In that spirit, the modern Fonda story remains open-ended. The descendants of Jelle and Hester are not bound to repeat their ancestors' work or even to live near their ancestral places; they are connected by a record that continues to be researched, corrected, and shared.

Sources and editorial notes

1. Primary family compilation: "Hollywood" (14_Hollywood.html), "Vietnam War" (15_Vietnam War.html), and "Freedom and Prosperity" (16_Freedom and Prosperity.html), from the legacy Fonda Family in America archive supplied for this project. Biographical claims follow the archive unless otherwise stated.
2. Henry Jaynes Fonda, Jane Seymour Fonda, Peter Seymour Fonda, and Bridget Jane Fonda: family compilation "Hollywood." The passage summarizes documented careers rather than treating films as biographical proof of private beliefs.
3. "Stars in Action-Packed Film," National Safety Council (December 1947), supplied clipping; Terry Lee, "Fonda to lead re-enactment at Oriskany," *Syracuse Herald-American* (15 May 1977), p. 92; D. J. van der Meer, "De Fryske ôfstamming fan myn fiere efternicht Jane Fonda," *Genealogysk Jierboekje* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 1986), pp. 64–68. The reported 1980 Montgomery County archival visit awaits a contemporary reference.

4. Peter Francis Fonda (1945–1968) and Jane Fonda’s Vietnam-era activism: “Vietnam War” family compilation. Military service, casualty records, and the 1972 Hanoi visit should be checked against original sources during final reference review.
5. Gorton R. Fonda, Howard Breese Fonda, Jere Williams Fonda, Avery Hunt Fonda, and Donald Albert Fonda Jr.: “Freedom and Prosperity” family compilation. Professional directories, published notices, and obituaries are identified there; specific claims warrant original-source review.
6. Illustrations 10.1 and 10.2 are newly created interpretive color images of period settings; neither depicts a documented Fonda home, person, or event.

Epilogue

The voyage from the Netherlands to New Netherland was one beginning, not an ending. Across nearly three and a half centuries, descendants of Jelle and Hester appear in the records of colonial settlements, farms and mills, courtrooms, military campaigns, western communities, laboratories, businesses, churches, and the arts. Their lives did not follow a single path. Taken together, they show how a family's history became part of a much larger American story.

The thread that connects these chapters is not a shared occupation, a uniform set of beliefs, or even a single spelling of the surname. It is the evidence of relationships and the persistence of family connections as circumstances changed. Some descendants stayed near the Mohawk and Hudson valleys; others made their homes far away. The archive allows us to follow many of these journeys, although never all of them.

The value of an unfinished record

A family history is assembled from fragments. A marriage entry may establish a relationship but reveal almost nothing about a household's daily life. A military record may document service without conveying the experience of fear or separation. A newspaper or later reminiscence may preserve a striking story, while leaving important details impossible to confirm.

This book has tried to give those fragments a readable narrative without turning reasonable possibilities into proven facts. Its shorter personal stories bring individual experiences forward; its notes identify when they depend on retrospective accounts. Where the record falls silent, the silence matters. The unanswered question of Jelle's parentage, addressed early in the book, is one reminder that a persuasive family tradition is not the same thing as verified ancestry.

The Fonda.org archive remains the larger resource behind these pages. It contains names, documents, research notes, and individual stories that cannot all be reproduced in a short, illustrated history. This volume is therefore a doorway into the archive, not a replacement for it. New documents may refine a date, correct an identification, or make an unexpected connection possible. Such changes are part of responsible genealogical work.

Where the Historical Record Ends

As the Fonda family story approaches the present day, the available genealogical record becomes less complete. This is not because the family's history has become less interesting or significant, but because modern privacy standards appropriately limit public access to information about living and recently deceased individuals.

One of genealogy's most valuable resources, the United States Federal Census, remains confidential for 72 years after each census. The most recent publicly available census is therefore 1950, leaving researchers with limited access to the detailed household information that makes earlier generations easier to document.

Other sources, including newspapers, obituaries, public records, and family contributions, can help bridge some of these gaps. Social media and online resources also offer information about

recent generations, but such material can be incomplete, inaccurate, or intrusive. The availability of personal information does not necessarily make its collection or publication appropriate.

For these reasons, this family history concentrates on generations whose lives can be documented through accessible historical records. More recent generations are represented selectively, with respect for individual privacy and the wishes of living family members.

The Fonda family story continues, even where the public genealogical record must respectfully end.

For those who come after

The chapters ahead of future researchers will be written from records not yet public, papers that families choose to preserve, and discoveries that cannot now be anticipated. Their work may answer questions left open here and raise others of their own. They will inherit both the opportunities and the responsibilities of telling stories about real people.

The most enduring contribution of a family archive is not the appearance of certainty. It is the careful preservation of evidence, the willingness to revise an account when better information emerges, and the knowledge that individual lives deserve to be remembered without being embellished. The story began long before this book and extends beyond its last page.

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