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AMSTERDAM RECORDS OF THE FONDA FAMILY

CONTRIBUTED BY ROBERT G. COONEY, JR.

In 1962 the late Dr. Simon Hart of the Amsterdam Municipal Archives was asked to conduct an investigation into the origins of the Fonda family. The result was the discovery of the marriage record of the New Netherland immigrant Jillis/Gillis/Jellis/Jelle Douwes Fonda, the baptisms of his children, and also some notarial records of interest.

The late Mrs. John Spell in her 1964 article "A Career Woman in 17th Century New York" (REC. 95:129f.) stated that "Gillis (Jillis) Douwes Fonda, a native of Friesland in the Netherlands, arrived in Fort Orange (present Albany, N.Y.) in 1651. He was accompanied by his wife Hester Jans [sic] and three children . . ." Mrs. Spell identified four children of the couple and gave "birthdates" for three of them from unspecified "records in Amsterdam"; this suggests that she saw the same baptisms found by Dr. Hart, but she did not mention the marriage or notarial records.

The Dutch Settlers Society of Albany *Yearbook*, Volume 48 (1981–1984), page 17, contains an article "The Fonda Family" prepared by Howard A. McConville. This article describes the marriage record and gives the children's baptismal dates and sponsors, but does not credit anyone for discovering these records, cite precisely where the records were found, or quote any of them in their original form. The article does not mention the notarial records.

Some accounts of the Fondas have claimed a noble Italian origin for the family, prior to its residence in Friesland. Such a claim was made by the Reverend William A. Williams in his *Early American Families* (Philadelphia, 1916, pages 24–25), and was apparently favored by the late actor Henry Fonda (*De Halve Maen* 36:4[Jan. 1962]:17). Dr. Hart, although finding no reference to the surname Fonda in Netherlands records, noted that many Frisian names were similar in form, and he expressed the opinion that "the conclusion that the name Fonda of Jelle Douwes would be of Italian origin . . . is a story."

All of the following records were found at the Amsterdam Municipal Archives (Gemeente Archief Amsterdam) and translated by Dr. Hart. The first is the marriage of the immigrant, from *Doop, Trouw en Begrafregisters* [Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers, hereafter DTB] No. 454 [*Kerkelijk Huwelijks Intekenregister* or Church Marriage Intentions Register] page 651:

den 19 Janwary 1641.
Compareerde als vooren Jelle Douwess van Agum, Smitsgesel woon/ende/ opt Bickerseylant geas/sisteer/t met, geen ouders hebb/ende/ out 25 jaer ende Hester Douwess van A/msterdam/ woon/ende/ op de Keysersgracht out 24 jaer, geen ouders hebb/ende/ geas/sisteer/t met Elsge Douwes haer stieffmoder.
/signed/ Jelle Douwes, Hester Douwessen
Overleggende acte van ouders consent. Dese personen zijn getrout den 10 february tot Diemen door Prudentius Wilhelmi predſikan/t aldaer.

19 January 1641.
Appeared as before Jelle Douwess from Agum, journeyman blacksmith, living on Bickers Island, assisted by [no name given], having no parents, 25 years old; and Hester Douwess from Amsterdam, living on the Keysergracht, 24 years old, having no parents, assisted by Elsge Douwes, her stepmother.
[signed as above]
Producing a deed of their parents' consent, these people were married on the 10th of February 1641 in Diemen by Prudentius Wilhelmi, minister there.

Whoever made this entry first wrote that the *groom* was assisted by Elsge Douwes, but this was erased. A note in the margin *haer behoutmoed/e/r* (her mother-in-law), presumably intended to replace "stepmother," was also erased. The clerk apparently was confused as to Elsge Douwes' role and relationship. Since the couple were able to obtain "their parents' consent" the phrase "having no parents" may mean that no parents (other than Elsge) were present in Amsterdam to assist in the proceedings, rather than that all the other parents were deceased.

According to Dr. Hart, the actual church marriage record at Diemen, near Amsterdam, does not survive. The above marriage intention was of particular interest because it revealed Jillis Douwes' place of origin, "Agum." Specialists at the Friesland State Archives at Leeuwarden were of the opinion that this referred to the small village variously written "Agum," "Egum," "Aegum," and "Eagum," located near the center of their province. The only early 17th century records for Agum which Dr. Hart found were those of the court of Idaarderadeel, a jurisdiction in which the village was located. He found references to inhabitants of "Agum" in these records, but none to a Jillis Douwes. A Douwe Jelles showed up in the inventory of Jetse Roberts 25 June 1639, owing his estate five guilders, but there was nothing to link him to Jillis Douwes. Dr. Hart also found no mention of the name Fonda. Beyond the reference to Agum in the Amsterdam marriage intention the origin of the immigrant could not be resolved (but see Postscript, below).

The children of Jillis and Hester were baptized in Amsterdam as follows:

Douwe, of Jelle Douwesz and Ester Douwes, 24 November 1641 by Rev. Wachtendorp at the Nieuwe Kerk, witness Annetje Jans (DTB 42:282).

Giertje, of Jelle Douwesz and Ester Douwes, 22 September 1643 by Rev. Holbeeck at the Nieuwe Kerk, witness Maritje Willems (DTB 42:375).

Sara, of Jelle Douwesz and Hester Douwes, Sunday 18 June 1645 at the Oude Kerk, witnesses Hille Claes and Witsche Diercx (DTB 8:55).

Abraham, of Jelis Douwesz and Hester Hester (sic) Douwesz, Sunday 14 April 1647 at the Oude Kerk, witnesses Hille Claes and Marij Douwes (DTB 8:123).

All of the churches mentioned above were Dutch Reformed. Both the marriage and baptismal records indicate that Hester's patronymic was Douwes, like that of her husband, and not Jans as reported by Mrs. Spell and others. The last witness, Marij Douwes, could presumably have been the child's aunt on either side, and Hille Claes may have been the Hilletgen Claesdr. named in the following notarial records. Most interesting is the witness Witsche Diercx, for another writer has suggested that this was the name of Jillis Douwes' mother (see Postscript).

The notarial archives of Amsterdam revealed a series of documents regarding debts owed by Jillis Douwes Fonda to merchants in Amsterdam, after his migration to New Netherland. Citations are to name of notary, folio and page number. The abstracts are by Dr. Hart.

1654 May 5. Jan Michgielsen, beer wholesale dealer in Amsterdam at the Dolle Begijnsteeg, gives a power-of-attorney to Theunis Jansz Seijlenmaker from here, to claim and to receive from Gillis Douwes and his wife, formerly innkeepers here, now living on Manhattan in New Netherland,* the sum of f664.18.– which is due to him as remainder for delivered beer (Jacob de Winter 2281[1]:55).

1654 May 19. Theunis Davidtsz., shipscarpenter, living at the Houtuinen [Timber-yards] on the Droogbak next to the Waterpas, for himself as son and heir and for the co-heirs of his mother, the late Hilletgen Claesdr., formerly widow of her last husband Claes Jansz., gives a power-of-attorney to Jurrien Thijsz., who is going to New Netherland as a free merchant, to claim and to receive from Jelle Douwes, citizen and brandy-distiller in New Netherland, the sum of f600 plus the interest due. This was due to his mother and now to her children and her heirs according to a related debenture, a copy of which was sent along with Jurrien Thijsz. Because of the risk of the sea, the original was not sent along. He is to give a receipt to Jelle Douwes after payment. He is authorized to go to law against Jelle Douwes if necessary (Hendrick Schaef, 1304:121).

1655 April 26. Cornelia Wachtens, widow of Johannes ter Weijde, woman beer wholesale dealer at the Herenmarkt here, gives a power-of-attorney to Marritge Damen, now wife of Hendrick Andriesz., free inhabitant of New Netherland, who is ready to depart for there, to claim and to receive from Jelle Douwe, distiller in New Netherland, the amount of 31 guilders and 8 stivers which is due to her from him and his wife Hester because of delivered beer and money advanced for the impost and excise-duty, according to a relative account in her debt-book (Hendrick Schaef, 1305:64).

1657 March 17. Theunis Davidtsz., shipscarpenter living on the first island beyond the yard of Jacob Cornelisz., acting for himself as son and co-heir and for the other co-heirs of his mother, the late Hilletgen Claesdr., formerly widow of her last husband Claes Jansz., gives a power-of-attorney to Direk Jansz Croon to claim and to receive from Jelle Douwes, citizen and brandy-distiller in New Netherland, the sum of f600 plus the interest due. He owes this amount to Hilletje Claes and now to her heirs according to a relative debenture a copy of which is taken along by the proxy. Subtracted from this must be that which he already appears to have paid (Hendrick Schaef, 1307:71).

* This reference to Manhattan may be an error, as all other evidence indicates Jillis (Gillis) was then at Fort Orange (Albany). The reference to both Jillis and his wife being former innkeepers at Amsterdam is of special interest.

1657 April 5. Jan Michgielsen, beer wholesale dealer in Amsterdam, gives a power-of-attorney to Cornelis Martensen Factoor, who is ready to depart for New Netherland, to claim and to receive the amount of fl644.18.– which is due to him from Gillis Douws, formerly innkeeper in Amsterdam but at present distiller living near the fort Orangien in New Netherland, because of delivered and paid beer (Nicolaes van Born, 2142:77).

1664 January 12. Theunis Davidtsz., shipscarpenter in Sloterdijk, son and co-heir, acting also for his sister, co-heir of the late Hilletgen Claesdr., formerly widow of her last husband Claes Jansz., gives a power-of-attorney to Mr. Jacob Hendricxsz., surgeon in New Netherland and ready to depart for there again, to claim and to receive from the widow and heirs of Jelle Douwesz., during his life citizen and brandy-distiller in New Netherland, the sum of 600 guilders plus the interest due.

Jelle Douwesz. owed this amount to his mother and now to her heirs according to a relative debenture the original of which was shown to the notary and copy of which is given along with Jacob Hendricxsz. Subtracted from this amount must be 68 guilders for 7 whole beavers of 8 guilders apiece and 3 half-beavers of 4 guilders apiece which Jurriaen Thijssen received from him on 22 August 1654 also on a power-of-attorney (Hendrick Schaef, 1371:16–17).

Postscript by the Associate Editor

An article "De Fryske Ofstamming Fan Myn Fiere Efternicht Jane Fonda" ("The Frisian Descent of My Distant Cousin Jane Fonda"), by Douwe J. van der Meer, was published in the *Genealogysk Jierboekje 1986* of the Frisian Academy (Leeuwarden, Netherlands 1986), pages 64–68. According to Mr. van der Meer, an article in the *Leeuwarder Courant* had reported information on the Frisian origin of the American Fondas, originally published in "*The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* of July 1984" (apparently meaning to refer to the previously mentioned article in the Dutch Settlers Society of Albany *Yearbook* of 1984).

Van der Meer had traced his own ancestry to one Antie Douwedr. of Eagum (Agum), who in 1655 married Sytse Jelles. Antie was a daughter of Douwe Everts, who lived on the farmstead "Hornema" at Agum, and died in July 1669; he married Wytscke Dircxdr., and van der Meer proposed that among their other children was Jillis Douwes, the American immigrant. This would give Jillis a grandfather Evert Benedictus (died 1610) of the same place, probable great-grandparents Benedictus Jacobs (died c.1582) and Aecht Eernstdr., and possible great-great-grandparents Jacob Harmens and Bot Hennedr. The article includes considerable detail on these individuals and their families.

Mr. van der Meer felt that this must be Jillis Douwes' family because Agum was an extremely small community and in the few surviving records he could see no other Douwe who might be Jillis' father. He noted that Douwe Everts had an uncle, the Rev. Jelijs (Jillis) Benedictus, and it might be expected that Douwe Everts would name a son for him. Jillis Douwes Fonda called his first son Douwe, the name of both of the child's grandfathers. The names of the other Fonda children, Giertje, Sara and Abraham, do not occur in the family as described by van der Meer. If the latter has indeed found Jillis Douwes' parents, neither of the first two daughters was named for the paternal grandmother Wytscke Dircxdr. Nevertheless, though van der Meer does not mention it, *a woman with this unusual name (recorded as Witsche Diercx) was a sponsor at the baptism of Jillis' daughter Sara in Amsterdam.*

In Frisian records van der Meer did not find any mention of the name Fonda, but in the vicinity of Kollum in northeast Friesland, where Benedictus Jacobs lived, he came across the names Banda, Ronda and Sinda. He also noted that in 1580 Benedictus was manager of an estate near Kollum called "Foyngha," and there was a chance that "Fonda" was a corruption of that name.