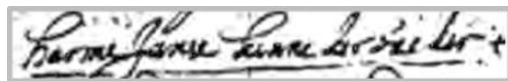


The origin of the name Knickerbocker

Bryan Knickerbocker
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A deed from December 11, 1682 is the first time that any form of “Knickerbocker” has ever been found. The deed mentions our ancestor three times. The first is the easiest to read, and is shown here. (The entire deed is shown on the next page.)

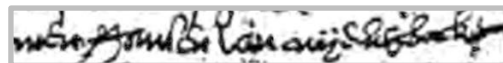


The deed was written by Robert Livingston, who was the Albany County secretary.

The deed involves the sale of land owned by Anthony Van Schaick. Mr. Livingston and Mr. Van Schaick were wealthy, knew each other, knew how to read and write, and had lots of experience with deeds. This is quite different from our ancestor, who was poor, and probably struggled with both reading and writing. Our ancestor probably didn't have much input into the creation of the deed.

The deed contains about 300 words. It probably took about 15 or 20 minutes to write. As shown in the snapshot above, our ancestor was described as “harmen janse kenne ker backer.”

After all 300 words were written, our ancestor was asked to sign the deed. The signature looks like “harmen janse van” followed by a scribble. The last six letters of the scribble appear to say “backer.”



Some people have claimed that the name “Knickerbacker” came about because people had trouble reading this signature. This is not true. Robert Livingston had written “kenne ker backer” three times before he ever handed the deed to our ancestor.

Thus, Robert Livingston accidentally created the name Knickerbacker. To understand how this happened, we must understand what the words “kenne ker backer” meant to the man who wrote them – a man who was born in Scotland, whose second language was Dutch.

KENNE and BACKER are easy to translate. KENNE is a variation of KEN and KENNEN, meaning “know.” BACKER, with the CK pair, is a common misspelling of the Dutch word for “baker.” When Robert Livingston described our ancestor as Harmen Janse kenne ker backer, he was probably referring to Harmen Jansen “known as the baker.”

Now, if we go back to the signature: the scribble after “van” might be a place name, or a surname, followed by “ker backer.” Some might claim the scribble includes Van Wye, a reference to an ancient Dutch family. Others might claim “Van Wyje” or “Van Wyck” as a reference to a location. Either way, our ancestor was describing himself as Harmen Janse van *scribble* ker Backer, the baker from either a family or a place.

The next step is to confirm that our ancestor was a baker. We have found a few mentions of our ancestor in the records of Rensselaer's Wyck, in the years 1676 to 1682. However, we haven't yet seen him described as a baker. The closest that we've come is that we can prove that Andries Hansen, our ancestor's friend and neighbor, was a baker. The search continues.

This is the only explanation that we've ever seen that covers both the words written by Robert Livingston, and the signature of our ancestor. Even if the baker theory is wrong, the fact remains that the words “kenne ker backer” were written before our ancestor was asked to sign anything.

Any theory about the origin of the name must consider the role of Robert Livingston, the man who helped define our last name.

The Deed from December 11, 1682



Appeared before me, Rob^t Livingston, secretary of Albany, colony of Renselaerswyck and Schaenhechtady, etc., Anth° van Schaik of the one side and Harme Janse Kinnekerbacker of the other side, who declared that they had contracted and agreed with each other in love and friendship, in manner following: Anth° van Schayk acknowledges that he has sold and Harme Janse Kinneker Backer that he has bought of him a piece of arable land at the north or upper end of the Halve Maen over against the Skachkook path, being bounded by a little kill on the south side and likewise by a little kill on the north side, to the east the river, and to the west the high woods, the grantee to have two hundred paces above the heights next the woods to be fenced in and furthermore free range for his cattle, with the persons living in the Halve Maen ; for which piece of arable land and the privileges aforesaid Harme Janse Kinneker Backer promises to pay to Anth° van Schayk the quantity of thirty good salable beaver skins, to be paid in the three following years, every time a just third part, to wit, ten beavers in January 1683/4, ten beavers in January 1684/5 and the last ten beavers in January 1685/6 ; on the last payment the seller promises to deliver a proper conveyance of the aforesaid land, free and unincumbered (saving the lord's right); with which the contracting parties acknowledge they are content, binding for the execution of these presents their persons and estates, real and personal, present and future, nothing excepted, submitting the same to the authority of all lords, courts, tribunals and judges. Done in Albany, in presence of Gabriel Thomson and Mr. Abraham van Tricht called as witnesses hereto, the 11th of December 1682.

Antony van Schaick
 Hermen Jansen van Wyekybacker
 Gabriell Tomasen
 Abram van Tricht, surgeon
 In my presence,
 RobT. Livingston, Secretary

Original deed from *Sketches of Allied Families, Knickerbacker-Viele, Historical and Genealogical* (1916).

Translation from *Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerswyck, Volume 2*, translated from the original Dutch by Jonathon Person (1916).