

The Wall Family Name: Origins and Early Ancestry

Of the four family names that are the focus of this book; Dyck, Harder, Claassen, and Wall, the least is known about our Wall ancestors. According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Wall is a Mennonite family name of probable Dutch origin. The author Horst Penner, in *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, says unequivocally that the Walls come from Holland. Originally the name was spelled “de Waal” as noted in records of the Mennonite congregation at Danzig, West Prussia. Among the West Frisian Islands off the west coast of Holland is the island of Texel, the largest of this group of islands. A prominent city on the island of Texel is De Waal. The city of De Waal was home to many Anabaptists and had a Mennonite congregation before 1550. Thus it seems highly probable that the city of De Waal on the island of Texel is the origin of our family name Wall. The confines of the 71 square miles of the island of Texel undoubtedly made the existence of Mennonites precarious, and for this reason they were among the first to immigrate to Danzig. Anabaptist trial records from Amsterdam, Holland, noted by Horst Penner, list a Jacob de Waal that died in Danzig in 1549. The signature of Jacob's son or grandson, Pieter De Waele, appears in Danzig Mennonite records in 1586. The fourth generation of this family was represented by Elias de Wale operating a brandy distillery in Danzig in 1660. Gradual changes in the spelling of the name can be seen through these four generations. By the 18th century “Wall” had become the most common spelling, but with many families retaining the “de.”

As with most Mennonites, agriculture was the primary pursuit of the Wall family. In 1726 additional farmland near Marienburg was made available to Mennonite farmers. Isaac and Jacob Wall of Danzig settled in the village of Stadtfelde, near Marienburg, in 1727 and probably became members of the Heubuden Mennonite congregation formed in 1728. As the years passed the Wall name appeared in the records of the Mennonite congregations of Tiegenhagen, Rosenort, and Ladekopp.

Our oldest known ancestor in the Wall family is Johann Wall (I) born in Broske, West Prussia, exact date unknown, *circa* 1760. Broske is in close proximity to Ladekopp so it is logical to assume that our Wall ancestors were members of this Mennonite congregation. Johann married Helene Claassen, date unknown, and died at a date unknown. Helene's date of birth is unknown, but the year of her death was 1846 at Broske, West Prussia. Johann and Helene's son Johann Wall (II) was born at Broske, West Prussia, date unknown. It is not known if he had any brothers or sisters.

On February 24, 1815, Johann Wall (II) married his first wife, Justine Toews. Justine was the daughter of Johann Toews, date of death April 28, 1813, and Justine Claassen, born July 10, 1771, died January 10, 1806. Johann Toews was a teacher and minister at the Schonsee Mennonite Church. In addition to daughter Justine, there were two Toews sons, Franz and Johann.

Again, using *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* as reference, Toews is listed as a name of probable Dutch origin. Horst Penner says the Toews come from East Frisia and the lower Rhine regions. At Gladbach three Thewis are listed in the baptismal records for 1622. A Peter Tewes is listed as plenipotentiary of the East Frisian Mennonites in 1658. It isn't until the early years of the 18th century (1727-1734) that Tewes are found in the Mennonite villages of the Vistula Delta

region of West Prussia; Cornelis Tewes at Einlage, Cornelius Tewes at Frejehuben, and Cornels Tewes at Schonsee. In the records of the Ladekopp Old Flemish Mennonite congregation, Isaac and Johann Toews are listed as ministers from 1762 and 1767 respectively.

Johann Wall (II) and Justine Toews had two children during their nine-year marriage. Johann Wall (III) was born January 8, 1816 and his sister Catherine was born *circa* June 1824. Justine Toews Wall died June 2, 1824, most likely from complications of childbirth. In December of 1824 Johann (II) married Margaret Regier. There were six children born to this union; Helene, Cornelius, Gerhardt, Jakob, Maria, and Elisabeth. Of these six children only information is available about Gerhardt. He was born May 6, 1835, in West Prussia. Gerhardt married Margaret Hamm and died on June 20, 1878. No date or place of death is available for Johann Wall (II). His second wife, Margaret Regier, died in 1852.

Johann Wall (III), our direct descendant grandfather, married Catharina Wiens on November 8, 1816, at Schonsee An Der Weichel (Schonsee On The Vistula). Catharina was born April 1, 1827, at Neumunsterbergerfeld, West Prussia. Her parents were Peter and Helene Wiens.



Cornelius Seibert, half brother of Justine Wall Dyck, uncle of Jacob J. Dyck. Date of birth *circa* 1865. Cornelius is wearing the uniform of the Russian Forest Service (Forsteiwesen). Photo *circa* 1885. Mennonite men served in the Forest Service in lieu of serving in the Czarist Russian Army.

Photo: Authors' collection.

Catharina's maiden name of Wiens is another old Prussian Mennonite name. Horst Penner's research into the origins of family names of Prussian Mennonites tells us that the Wiens' come from the German city of Cologne on the Rhine River in Westphalia. Old names for what was known as the "wine quarter" near Cologne were Vingst, Vinze, and Winze. From these names evolve that of Hermann Wynes, a teacher in Danzig *circa* 1568. Menno Simons spent a good deal of time in Cologne, baptizing many into the Mennonite faith. Menno's travels to Danzig undoubtedly pointed the way for immigration for his followers in Westphalia far to the west of Prussia. By the close of the 17th century Wynes had become Wiens and no members of this family were living in Danzig proper, but had moved into the surrounding countryside. The first Wiens recorded to be living in the Vistula Delta, the Werder, was Harem (Hermann) Wiens in the village of Altababke. Horst Penner believes this Hermann to be a grandson of Hermann Wynes, the Danzig teacher.

Four children were born to Johann Wall (III) and Catharina Wiens, all in Mierauerwald, West Prussia. Julius, the eldest son, was born February 15, 1852. Next were two daughters, Anna, born July 25, 1853, and Justine, our grandmother, born February 1, 1855. A second son, Cornelius, was born May 2, 1858.

These four children being born in West Prussia shows that Johann (III) and Catharina were not among the initial group of 100 families that went to Samara, Russia, to start the new Am Trakt colony in 1853. They were, however, among the earlier settlers, having made the overland trek to Am Trakt from West Prussia in a covered wagon in 1862. Within a couple of years of the family's arrival at Am Trakt, Johann Wall (III) died leaving his wife Catharina a widow with four children. The date of Johann's death is unknown. Catharina remarried within a short time. Her second husband had been the manager of the Wall farm and his name was Johann Siebert. He was quickly accepted by the young Wall children as a much-loved stepfather. Johann Siebert and Catharina Wall Siebert had three additional children, two daughters and a son. Years later, after he had been widowed, Johann Siebert continued to be the object of great affection for his Wall stepchildren, and later, Dyck step-grandchildren.

It was at the home of her mother, Catharina, and stepfather, Johann Siebert, that young Justine Wall married Jacob Dyck (IV). Johannes Dietrich Dyck, Jacob's older brother, had moved to the Am Trakt settlement soon after his marriage to Helene Jantzen and recorded the wedding in his diary.

26 Sept. 1873-Afternoon at Sieberts' in Orloff with Brother Jakob Dyck on the occasion of wedding. Jakob Toews performed the ceremony and Bernhard Harder from

Molotchna Colony gave a speech. There were 69 families invited.