

clayton 203

You wanted me to write up a Family Tree. I think it will be a queer one that I will write, as it is a little out of my line, but I hope it won't be as bad as the one that I read of, for which the man had paid five hundred dollars and then would have paid five thousand to have it undone. I will leave out the objectionable things.

Well, we did not spring from monkeys, but we did spring from the good old Holland Dutch, and that we are through and through.

I will begin with the Onderdonks as I have a letter here, sent me by a member of the Onderdonk Family, who had been looking up our Family in Holland, as he was getting up a Family Tree, and this is what the letter says:

Our first Ancestors were Van Der Hucks, an Ancient People living in North Brabant near Bois Le Duc, Holland, and were of the Nobility. Our first Ancestor came here in sixteen forty one, and had the distinction of being the first lawyer in the New Netherlands. The Onderdonks were Van Der Hucks in Holland. So much for his story.

Your Great, Great, Great Grandfather served in the Revolutionary War, as a private in Col. A Hawk Hay's Second Orange County Militia Regiment. His name was Adrian Onderdonk. His son Cornelius, my Grandfather, was born April 26th, 1772 at what was then called Kakiat, now West New Hempstead, Rockland County, then Orange County, as at that time the two Counties were one, and was called Orange County, died April 29th, 1852, at the same place. He had always lived on that farm, and his Father before him and I don't know how many more. After his death my Father bought the farm and put up a new house and of course tore down the old.

I was indeed very sorry to see it torn down, as I had spent many pleasant days at my Grandmother's home. They were such dear old people, and I loved the old place so much. It was of course, a farm.

I have heard my Father say that his Grandfather kept slaves when New York was a slave state, but they had freed them before New York abolished slavery but there were two, a man and wife, who wanted to stay with them.

My Father's Mother was also of Holland ancestry. Her name was Anna Blauvelt, a descendant of Judge Blauvelt, also of Rockland County, New York State.

I think you must remember my Father, your Great Grandfather, Thomas Onderdonk, he was always so fond of the little children. I can see him now at our house at Spring Valley walking around the grounds with you by the hand talking as interestedly to you as if you were a grown up.

You of course remember my Mother, your Grandma Onderdonk. I am indeed very sorry that you did not know her when she as herself, for she had an uncommonly bright mind and I could never understand how one so wonderfully bright could lose her mind so entirely, without any seeming cause, even though she was old, in her ninety second year when she died, but had been losing for a number of years. Her maiden name was Margaret Westervelt Springsteen. Her Father, my Grandfather John Springsteen, was a descendant of Casper Springsteen, who settled on the island of Manhattan in 1635, also from Holland. But my Grandfather was born and brought up in Rockland County, New York State, but he lived as long as I can remember at 132 Charles Street, Old Greenwich Village, New York City. The old house is still standing.

My Grandfather Springsteen was for many years wood inspector in New York City, when wood only was used for fuel.

My Grandmother Springsteen was Holland for sure. Her maiden name was Rachel Van Gelder and her Mother's maiden name was Jane Ackerman. She was a sister of your Great, Great Grandfather; consequently your Great Grandfather, and my Grandmother were Cousins.

This Jane Ackerman, my great Grandmother who married first James Van Gelder, son of David Van Gelder, married a second time Joseph Mable, a native of the quaint historic little town of Tappan. He owned a large farm there, and it was on his property that the old '76 house stood where Major Andre' was imprisoned, the '76 house still stands there. My great Grandmother lived in the corner house, I remember it, and old fashioned frame house, but it has long since been replaced by a red brick structure, having passed into the hands of my Mothers Aunt and Uncle Doctor Morris Bartow, then if you turn directly a west from this corner and go a half a mile, you come to the place where Major Andre' was executed, also on my great Grandmothers farm, the very spot is marked by a Granite Monument, the second one that was placed there, as the first one was blown up by some foolish person who thought it was put up to honor him, when it was only done to mark the spot. This too is all down in history I know, but I thought it might be interesting to you to know that it was on my great Grandmothers farm.

Your own Grandpa Henry Smith was born at West New Hempstead, June the twenty eight, Eighteen twenty six. His Father and Grandfather were also born on the same farm, but not the same house.

The house in which your own Grandpa Henry Smith was born and brought up, is still standing, next to the Brick Church on the same side of the road. I think you must have ridden up there sometimes when you were a boy, and so know where it is.

Your Great, Great Grandfather Abram Smith was an extensive land owner in that section, the Brick Church section, and I think that the ground upon which the Brick Church stands, and the old Cemetery, and the School House are all on ground that belonged to that estate, as it is a strip right out of that farm. I have no authority for saying this but think I am right, as in those days property owners seemed to think the right thing to do, was to donate property for a church to be built on. The truth of it could be found out by searching the Brick Church records, but I will take it for granted, as I am a little too old for that.

Then at your Great, Great Grandfather Abram Smith's death, the farm was divided between this three sons, of which your Great Grandfather, Cornelius Smith was one.

I am sorry you cannot remember him. He was such a dear old man. I forgot to say he also was of Holland Ancestry. He built a house on the land left him from his Father's estate and died there at the good old age of eighty six. His wife your Great Grandma Smith was also of old Holland stock. Her maiden name was Hannah Ackerman and she also was a Cousin of your Great Grandfather Ackerman so you see your Great Grandma Smith and your Great Grandfather Ackerman were Cousins. We seem to be rather a mixed up lot.

Now I want to say there is no more Smith farm, as at your Great Grandfather Smith's death it was sold, as not one of his five sons wanted to be farmers, and had long before taken themselves to New York City to seek their fortunes there, and were all highly respected citizens.

You surely must remember your own dear Grandpa, Henry Smith. He was so gentle and kind with the children and in fact with everybody. None knew him but to love him; none named him but to praise. He was for number of years a manufacturer of piano sounding boards. He went to his reward at the age of fifty seven.

I was born in New York City on the twelfth of July Eighteen Thirty, so you see I am getting on toward the Century mark, and have seen many changes. I can remember when there were no stoves. They had big fire places to heat the house and to do the family cooking. Then there were no matches that would ignite by scratching, but I well remember seeing my Father strike a light with a flint and steel, thus setting fire to a scorched rag which he kept in a tin box like a shoe blacking box. They called it Tinder. Then they had a match on a curled round like a shaving with sulphur on the ends, which they would touch to the tinder in the box, which had been lighted with the flint and steel.

It was some trouble to light a fire in those days. Sometimes they went to their neighbor to get some coals, if they had one near enough. You may be sure they did not let the fire go out if they could help it. They used to cover the coals with the ashes to keep it over night. I was very little girl at that time, but I remember some things very clearly.

I can remember my Father taking me to walk in the Country when Ganzevoort Street was out of town, and was called the Great Kiln Road on account of the Number of Kilns there, for making pottery.

Can you imagine such a thing as Ganzevoort Street being the extent of New York City?

I know that we need not trace back very far, to find it a much smaller city, but this having come under my own observation seems almost impossible. But I forget that I have lived ninety years, almost a century.

This has been a wonderful century. I cannot think there ever was one before, so full of inventions, and can there be another?

Then there comes to my mind the time when the only water supply in New York City was from wells with wooden pumps to draw the water. I do not know whether there was one on each corner or not, but you may be sure there was great rejoicing in New York City when Croton Water was introduced.

They had a grand celebration. I cannot recall the date, but think it was the early forties, but of course all these things have been handed down in History, and are not new to any of you, but as they have come under my own observation in the earlier days thought I would write them down.

Now, my wish is ALL my dear Children, Grand-Children and Great Grand-Children shall prove to be the Good Christian men and women.

(signed) Grandma Smith

The foregoing was written by Sarah Jane Smith (nee' Ondendonk) at the request of her grandson, Louis Earl Ackerman, about 1920.

D. C. de Gruchy
October 1983