

3. The Vanderveers and the Dutch Reformed Church

Jacobus Vanderveer Sr.'s cultural allegiance was further demonstrated by the fact that his will also included legacies to the Dutch Reformed churches at Raritan, Readington, "New Shaneck" (Neshanic) and the unlocated "Cannowago" as well as an acre for the church at "New Vergene" (also unlocated) to erect a house of worship. An understanding of the Vanderveer family's relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church is critical to understanding its place within the greater Dutch-American community. Jacobus Vanderveer Sr. served as a church elder for many years having donated the very land on which the Dutch Reformed Church of Bedminster was erected *circa* 1760. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Dutch Reformed Church was the central institution of Dutch-American cultural life and was its dominant unifying force. Documentation of participation in the church administration and church related activities is one potential measure of an individual's or a family's Dutch-American cultural affinity. Jacobus Vanderveer Sr.'s role as one of the major organizers of the Dutch Reformed Church of Bedminster is clearly evidence of his position in the local "Dutch" community, but the Vanderveer family's relationship to the church is closer and more complex than simple participation in church business. Jacobus Vanderveer Jr. took for his wife, Mariah Hardenbergh, the daughter of Jacob Ruten Hardenbergh, the minister of the Dutch Reformed Churches of North Branch, Neshanic, Bedminster, Raritan and Millstone.

Jacob R. Hardenbergh, born in Ulster County, New York in 1738 had studied theology in the house of the previous minister of these churches, Reverend John Frelinghuysen. John Frelinghuysen, in addition to being one of the most influential figures in the American Dutch Reformed Church, was the son of the most important historical figure in the American Dutch Reformed Church, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen came to North America in 1720 to serve in a position of religious oversight for the "Dutch" settlements in the Raritan Valley. Although officially serving only as the minister to the newly formed Raritan Valley consistories, Frelinghuysen soon rose to such prominence that he became the Church's most influential American figure. Frelinghuysen belonged to faction within the Dutch Reformed church that stressed pietist belief that held a somewhat softer view on the subject of predetermination than the more Calvinistic "orthodox" mainstream. These Pietist/Orthodox divisions within the church were long simmering and had played an important role in Dutch-American Colonial politics at least as far back as the 1680s when a group with Pietist leanings led by Jacob Leisler rebelled against the English government and briefly took over control of New York. Dutch Reformed Church members with orthodox views tended to side with the Anglo-governmental faction.

Frelinghuysen is best remembered as one of the early figures of the Great Awakening. His "innovative" and enthusiastic preaching style is known to have directly influenced the Awakening's most prominent figures, Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. With reference to the Dutch Reformed Church and "Dutch-American" culture, his contributions were twofold. First, and although he stubbornly held that his pietist vision represented the one and only theology of the Dutch Reformed theology, he fostered interdenominational dialogue that helped to assimilate members of the Dutch Reformed Church into the greater American Christian community. Second, and probably more importantly, Frelinghuysen fervently supported a movement to provide greater autonomy for the Dutch Reformed Church in America through the creation of an independent American ecclesiastical assembly and by providing for the domestic education and ordainment of new Dutch

Reformed ministers. The eventual attainment of these goals helped to further define Dutch-American cultural identity as being separate and distinct from both the broader Anglo-American population and ancestral northern European traditions.

Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen played another important role in the early history of the Dutch Reformed Church. He provided five sons to the ministry and two daughters to become the wives of ministers. John Frelinghuysen, who took over his father's position at the head of the Raritan Valley churches was the most prominent of these children and it was under his tutelage that Jacobus Ruten Hardenbergh became the first wholly American trained and American ordained minister in the Reformed Dutch church. John Frelinghuysen died in 1754 leaving Hardenbergh to fill his shoes...both professional and familial. Hardenbergh took over the ministry of the Raritan Churches and took Frelinghuysen's widow, Dinah van den Bergh Frelinghuysen, to be his wife. In 1757, Dinah bore Jacobus a daughter, Mariah Hardenbergh, who would grow up to marry Jacobus Vanderveer Jr.

Jacobus R. Hardenbergh began actively working toward the establishment of an American institution of higher learning to provide denominationally specific education to the Dutch Reformed Church's constituency. Hardenbergh's efforts, which included appeals to King George III and Provincial Governor William Franklin, ultimately resulted in 1766 in the granting of a charter for Queen's College the forerunner of Rutgers University. Closely associated with the College was the "Professorate," or as it was later known, the New Brunswick Theological Seminary, which finally provided for an American school for the training for prospective Dutch Reformed ministers.

Next to the Church, itself, Queen's College and the Professorate became the community's most important institutions serving to draw together and unite the greater Dutch-American community of New York and New Jersey. Its location in the Raritan Valley helped to further bolster the dominance of the region's prevailing "Dutch" character and to establish it as the most important center of Dutch-American culture. By the 19th century, the function of Rutgers University as a nursery of Dutch-American culture was well recognized and relied upon by the church and the community.

According to Firth Haring Fabend in his book entitled *Zion on the Hudson, Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals*, at Rutgers "a traditional sense of ethnicity was intentionally nurtured, a past-orientated identification, a collective memory, a special history, a consciousness of kin, in short, those characteristics that make up a sense of a distinctive peoplehood, the essence of ethnicity. Its home feeling was a potent force in attracting to both the college and the seminary young men from Reformed families all over the Dutch culture areas in New York and New Jersey (Fabend 2000:34-35).

Jacobus R. Hardenbergh, Jacobus Vanderveer's father-in-law, eventually became Queen's College's first President. Its first instructor was Frederick Frelinghuysen, John Frelinghuysen's son and Jacobus R. Hardenbergh's stepson (Rutgers University Libraries 2004). Through intermarriage with the Schenk family, Frederick Frelinghuysen and Elias Vanderveer were also brothers-in-law. These ties to the Frelinghuysen and Hardenbergh families demonstrate that the Vanderveer family, although not members of the group themselves were strongly linked with the inner circle of Dutch-American cultural elites.