
“Kees Pott,” Tilebaker: The First Potter in the Upper Hudson Valley?

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Having identified the locations of brick and tile industries in 17th century Beverwyck/Albany, the difficult challenge remaining is the research necessary to locate records of pottery manufacturing in the region. There appears to be no documentation of pottery production in the colony until 1767 when a pottery appeared on a map of the east (Rensselaer) side of the Hudson River (north of the I-90 bridge).² There are, however, a series of tantalizing clues to 17th century pottery manufacturing in references to a tilemaker named “Kees Pott” who worked in Rensselaerwyck in the 1650s and 1660s.³ It is known and accepted that in the 17th century the name “Kees” was a shortened form of the name “Cornelis.” The significance of the name “Pott” is not so clear. There are several factors to consider.

To begin, the name “Pott” might have been shortened from another name. Such abbreviations were common in the 17th century. Thus, the name “Pott” may have been short for either the name “De Pottere” or the name “De Pottebacker.” There are numerous references to

Cornelis de Potter, a lawyer in New Amsterdam in the mid-17th century, but no direct link from him to Beverwyck or any clay manufacturing industry exists. "De Pottebacker" means "the potter." There are many references to Dirck Claesen de Pottebacker, a New Amsterdam 17th century potter; there is no link from him to Beverwyck or anyone named Cornelis. Names had very different meanings in the 17th century: "Potter" meant "rascal" or "wag;" "pottebacker" meant "potbaker" or "potter" (ceramist). "Potter" in 17th century English had the same meaning as today.

In 17th century Dutch communities, a man's name often had a descriptive meaning: it could identify his trade, his home town, or his nationality. Thus, in a Dutch colony, "Kees Pott" might have meant "Cornelis the Potbaker" or, less likely, "Cornelis the Rascal." Such name designations referred more often to places and professions than they did to personal characteristics like "rascal."

It is also possible that a name had no meaning. However, if a man was known by two different names (i.e. John Jones and John the Baker), it is almost certain that one name had relevance to his life. Thus the first step in interpreting the name "Kees Pott" is to determine if that tilemaker was known by any other name.

A survey was made of 17th century tilemakers in the Dutch colony for anyone named Cornelis. That identification was relatively simple. A man named Cornelis Theunissen Hooageboom was clearly identified as a tilemaker on three occasions.⁴ There was, nonetheless, confusion about the identity of Cornelis Theunissen Hooageboom, the tilemaker.

There are at least two, probably three, individuals named Cornelis Hooageboom who lived and worked in the clay industries in the Dutch colonies, and all were related. Van Alstyne (1911) identified a man named Cornelis Hooageboom (1625-1684), the son of Jan Cornelissen Hooageboom, who was a lawyer and notary who lived in Amsterdam. Although Van Alstyne offered no evidence that this man ever visited the Dutch colonies, it is interesting that Cornelis de Potter (who lived in New Amsterdam from at least 1651 through 1658 or later) was also a lawyer and notary from Amsterdam. The records offer one very tenuous link between de Potter and the name Hooageboom.

On April 17, 1654, a deed transferred land on Manhattan Island from Pieter Adriensen to Cornelis de Potter and Cornelis Steenwyck.⁵ The original of the deed is lost; the copy contains no purchase price

and no payment terms. The lack of the original document is significant in relation to a document dated March 20, 1673, nineteen years later, wherein Pieter Adriensen filed papers stating that he had been paid in full by Cornelis Hoogeboom for a debt owed since April 4, 1659. The amount of the debt was 670 guilders.⁶ It is possible that these records refer to the same transaction. The transcription of the numbers in the dates of these two documents can easily have been in error. The 17th century Dutch script for "4" and "17" are very similar; so too are the script for "9" and "4." An error in one or both documents could make the difference in verifying this identification. It is difficult to determine if such a confusion actually occurred. The original document would help, but now it is lost. Here are examples of how these numbers may have been handwritten in 17th century Dutch script: 4 = 4 17 = 17 9 = 9. It is not difficult to see that, depending upon the clarity of the script, these numbers may have been miscopied. Unfortunately, the verifying documents do not exist; thus, the connections set forth here must remain speculative.

Charles Gehring documents three Hoogebooms working with clay in the Dutch colonies in the late 1650s; Pieter Cornelissen Hoogeboom, a brickmaker who worked at the Delaware; plus his son, Cornelis Pietersen Hoogeboom, also a brickmaker; and his nephew, Cornelis Theunissen Hoogeboom, a tilemaker. His son and nephew lived in Rensselaerwyck, "at Mme. D'Hulter's."⁷

The records indicate that Cornelis Pietersen Hoogeboom, the son, worked near Beverwyck in the 1650s, and by the early 1660s, he owned a brickyard in New Amsterdam. The records indicate that he bought a brickyard in Kingston in 1663.⁸ Cornelis Theunissen Hoogeboom, the nephew, was a tilemaker near Beverwyck from the 1650s. He then moved to Kingston in 1666 to join his cousin's brickyard.⁹

A series of events links Cornelis Theunissen Hoogeboom with "Kees Pott." In April of 1660, Theunes Theunesen sued Cornelis Hoogeboom for twenty-eight guilders in seawant.¹⁰ The court ordered Hoogeboom to pay within fourteen days. In June of 1660, Theunesen sued to collect twenty-eight guilders from Andries Herpertsen. Herpertsen, who owned the tile kiln from 1659 to 1662, had backed Cornelis Pott, who owed Theunesen the twenty-eight guilders in question; thus, he (Herpertsen) agreed to pay.¹¹ The debt in both of these records was the same (twenty-eight guilders). The plaintiff was the same (Theunes Theunesen). The time frame indicated a close connection (two months). But were Cornelis Hoogeboom and Cornelis Pott the same person?

In February of 1661, Cornelis Theunissen Hoogeboom was bonded

to Pieter Adriensen to pay off a debt that Hooegeboom owed to Adriensen. The bond arranged that Adriensen would be paid by Andries Herpertsen for Hooegeboom's work in Herpertsen's pantile kiln beginning in the summer of 1661.¹² In December of that same year, 1661, Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom contracted for an apprentice to help "in the work of tile making."¹³ The contract was to span two years. This made it clear Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom was a tilemaker who worked for Herpertsen; but, was he the same man who Herpertsen backed (as surety) in 1660—Cornelis Pott?

The answer is to be found in two records. In November 1662, a year after Hooegeboom hired the apprentice, and one and a half years after Hooegeboom bound himself to pay Adriensen through work at the tile kiln, Andries Herpertsen died, and his widow sold the pantile bakery (kiln) to Gerrit van Slichtenhorst. Significantly, the sale said that "Kees Pott, tile baker, is to remain in possession one year" to work according to a contract made between him (Pott) and Herpertsen.¹⁴

Was Kees (Cornelis) Pott the same man as Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom? Another record suggests that he was. One year after the sale of Herpertsen's kiln (January of 1664), Gerrit Slichtenhorst, the new owner of the tile kiln, made a contract with Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom for work in the tile yard.¹⁵ Recapping, in the sale contract for the pantile kiln dated 1662, a tilemaker, Kees Pott, was guaranteed the right to perform work at the kiln for one year. Thirteen months later, Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom contracted with the new owner of the kiln, Slichtenhorst, to work at the kiln. Given these events, with other documentary connections cited above, it is reasonable to assume that "Kees Pott" and "Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom" were the same person.

The final question to be answered is whether the identification of Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom as Kees Pott is significant in terms of Hooegeboom's vocation or in terms of his character. Was he a "rascal" or a "potter"?

Looking at Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom's activities, there are clues that can lead to the conclusion that people might have called Hooegeboom a "rascal." He illegally sold liquor to Indians and had been sued for not paying off a tavern bill.¹⁶ Yet, his behavior was not nearly so outrageous as many of his friends and neighbors. It seems unlikely that his behavior would have evoked much notice in the community.

It is more likely that the name indicated that Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom made pottery as a sideline. That fact certainly would explain why he was called "Pott." Most likely he was the only colonial potter north of New Amsterdam (New York City) at the time. A combination of professions was not unusual for that time period in the colonies. Furthermore, the combination of the profession of tile-making and pottery-making was fairly common in the region of Holland that Hooegeboom probably came from.

According to Van Alstyne, it is likely that the Hooegebooms came from Makkum in Friesland, Holland. Van Alstyne draws that conclusion from a survey of surviving names in Dutch communities. Writing in 1911, seventy-five years ago, before 20th century population movements and dispersals, he states that the name, Hooegeboom, "exists on the islands of Southern Holland and at Makkum at Friesland, a town noted for its manufacture of tiles."¹⁷ Significantly, there were some unique features to the tilemaking industry at Makkum. Makkum was not only a center for the production of tiles; it was one of the last areas to continue to maintain at least one major factory that combined the production of tiles and pottery under one roof.

The combination of pottery and tile production had been common in many of the Dutch majolica manufacturers in the late part of the 16th and early part of the 17th centuries. The increased importation of Chinese pottery during the second quarter of the 17th century caused a "general decline in the majolica trade" and "nearly resulted in the disappearance of mixed tile and majolica potteries" in Holland.¹⁸ However, some small mixed factories in Makkum and Harlingen and other Friesland towns persisted. If Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom did come from and was trained in one of these tile and pottery factories, it would explain why the combination of tilemaking and pottery would have been a natural situation for him.

Despite the strength of the circumstantial evidence, there remains no "hard" proof of the making of pottery by Hooegeboom or any other clay worker during the 17th century in the Beverwyck/Albany region. Technical experts, under the direction of Dr. Alan Gilbert, Fordham University, are in the process of analyzing sherds and clay samples from this region in an attempt to prove through physical means that which has not been proven through the written record. The results of that work are still in preparation. Nonetheless, circumstances strongly suggest that Cornelis Theunissen Hooegeboom was a working potter in Beverwyck (Dutch Colonial Albany). □

Notes

1. This article originally appeared as pp. 141-148 of a Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Teachers College, Columbia University; copyright 1987 by Dr. Patricia Barbanell.
2. Map of the Manor of Rensselaerswyck by Jno. R. Bleecker, reproduced in E. B. O'Callaghan, *The Documentary History of the State of New York* (Albany: 1850), Vol. 3, opposite p. 552.
3. Jonathan Pearson, Editor & Translator, *Early records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerwyck* (Albany, 1916-1919), Vol. 1, p. 317 and A. J. Van Laer, Translator, *Minutes of the Court of Fort Orange and Beverwyck* (Albany: 1920), Vol. 1, pp. 179, 225 & 271.
4. Pearson, Vol. 3, pp. 53, 138 & 266.
5. Isaac Newton P. Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan, 1498-1909* (New York: 1915-1938), Vol. 5, p. 402.
6. Dingman Versteeg, Translator, *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch—Kingston Papers* (Baltimore: 1980), Vol. 2, p. 732.
7. Charles T. Gehring, Translator & Editor, *New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch—Delaware Papers (Dutch Period)* (Baltimore: 1981), p. 350.
8. Versteeg, Vol. 1, p. 98.
9. Pearson, Vol. 3, p. 266.
10. Van Laer, Vol. 2, p. 247.
11. Van Laer, Vol. 2, p. 271.
12. Pearson, Vol. 3, p. 53.
13. Pearson, Vol. 3, p. 138.
14. Pearson, Vol. 1, p. 317.
15. Pearson, Vol. 3, p. 266.
16. Van Laer, Vol. 1, pp. 179 & 225.
17. William B. Van Alstyne, "Pioneers & Founders of New Netherland: the Hoogeboom Family," *The New Netherland Register*, Vol. 1, Nos. 4-5 (1911), p. 71.
18. Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: 1984), p. 24.