

New Paltz and the Pfalz

The ancestors of the people who founded New Paltz¹ were Calvinists caught in the religious turmoil of the mid-1500's in the area now split between Belgium and northern France. That area was at the time part of the "Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands" and was ruled by Spain, which was happy to be called "most Catholic" of nations. Life for Calvinists in the Netherlands was therefore more difficult than it was for Calvinists in the kingdom of France. Mostly Walloons³, they had turned to Calvinism in large numbers and were terribly punished, driven into exile or forcibly reconverted in the 1540's to the 1570's. Their exile in great numbers provided the refugee population their friends in the new nation of the United Netherlands used to settle New Amsterdam and the Hudson Valley in the first six decades of the 1600's.

Those who fled into exile had many places to go. Closest was Calais, which since it was wrested from England in 1559 enjoyed a modicum of freedom not available to protestants elsewhere in France. Further off was England, where Netherlands-trained textile workers were in demand in Sheffield, Canterbury, Dover, London and elsewhere. There were other sites friendly to Calvinists about Europe, particularly the *Pfalz*, or the Palatinate, which became Protestant early in the Reformation and had begun almost immediately to provide refuge for outcasts, primarily in the city of Frankenthal.

The Palatinate at that time held a position of particular importance in the Holy Roman Empire, which controlled most of Europe from the ninth century to the nineteenth. Its German name "*die Pfalz*," meaning "castle," identified it as one of the favored bulwarks of imperial power. Its leader was known as the *Pfalzgraf*, or the Elector Palatine, one of the twelve lords invested with the awesome responsibility of choosing the emperor when that opportunity presented itself. His residence was in Heidelberg, one of the great cities of the age. A brand of dinnerware popular now in department stores calls itself by the same title, "Pfaltzgraff," and it is a name that still calls up visions of wealth and opulence. And well it should, for the *Pfalzgraf* was one of the great noblemen of Europe for many centuries, and the still magnificent ruins of his castle in Heidelberg provide one of the great tourist attractions of our time.

But let us get back to Mannheim, where they still pronounce the word spelled *p-f-a-l-z* without the *f*, or *Paltz*, a pronunciation people living in New Paltz are familiar with. In 1618, another of the nations that were part of the Holy Roman Empire, Bohemia, with its capital in Prague, broke away from the Empire and set up its own republic, and when the Holy Roman Emperor sent some emissaries to Prague to negotiate, their hosts threw them out of the window. Fortunately they landed in a muddy moat--some say a manure pile--and weren't physically harmed. Then the officials of Bohemia reached out to Frederick V, Elector Palatine, and asked him to be their king, which he accepted and became Frederick I, of Bohemia. He might have been content with life in Heidelberg, where he and his wife, Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I of England, headed a magnificent court. The attractions and challenges of the new title, however, and the support of which he was assured, won him over. But in these volatile times, nothing was sure. It probably was lost on nobody that Frederick's Rheinpfalz and his newly acquired Bohemia were acting as if they wished to become the nucleus of a new Holy Protestant empire.

Frederick was crowned in November of 1619, and the powers of the Holy Roman Empire said he wouldn't last the winter and called him the "Winter King." Then, led by Spain and its cooperating Walloon forces, they made good their boast, running him out of Prague late in 1620. His timid father-in-law, off in England, did little to help him. Unfortunately that was not all, for the action against Bohemia was the beginning of the Thirty Years War, one of the bloodiest wars in history. It eventually involved even Sweden and Denmark, and countless numbers of people on all sides lost their lives. Frederick and his queen, Elizabeth Stuart, however, went into exile in the Netherlands, and there produced a brilliant family of thirteen children--all princes and princesses in the line of succession to the English throne. Through two of those children they became the ancestors of the present monarchs of every nation of Europe except Liechtenstein and Belgium. But Frederick and Elizabeth themselves never regained temporal power anywhere. (The story of their lives and those of their progeny is told in the novels of Margaret Irwin).

The struggle which started in 1618 did not stop until 1648, with the Treaty of Westphalia. By then the Winter King was dead, and his son Charles Louis had succeeded him. The Treaty assured the Pfalz freedom of worship, and its new ruler took advantage of it. He built a great non-sectarian church and a marvelously engineered bridge across the Rhine and like a good Mannheim city manager offered various incentives to new settlers and businesses. The most attractive, perhaps, was the right to leave at any time within twenty-five years, without exit tax or any other penalty.

The population straggled back into the devastated Palatinate, including some long-time Huguenot residents who had resided there for almost a century. Those who had spent the same period in exile took the Palatinate offer as a chance to test permanent residence, and immigration from elsewhere in the European continent, including France, flourished. The Huguenots had become accustomed to entering into binding contracts with the rulers of the lands they moved into. These were called, in Latin, "Privilegium," or "Statement of Privilege." They had signed one with the grandfather of Charles Louis in 1607, and in 1652 they signed others. By that year a number of Huguenot families, with their churches, were established on both sides of the Rhine.

We know most about the church in Mannheim, where the old congregation had been called "the Walloon congregation." This one, however, was "the French congregation," which seems to tell us that the people from the Netherlands were being joined by people from the kingdom of France. The church register of 1651 records in French the baptismal of the first two infants: Isaac Hendrick (October 2, 1651) and David Desmarest (December 20, 1651). (His father later became the founder of Hackensack). The baptismal was made by the pastor of the German congregation, but by April of 1652 the pastor was definitely French. His name was Du Besson, and it was he who reported on the church's first consistory.

It is interesting to note that the language of this first consistory record is consistent in every way with that of the first records of the New Paltz church. The ruling body is called by the Latin word *consistorium*, instead of *presbyterium*, as was most common in the British Isles; and the elders are referred to as *ancien*, as New Paltz's one elder, Louis DuBois, is identified in the first meeting of the New Paltz church, only thirty years later.

Most important, Matthew Blanchan, who was that same Louis DuBois's father-in-law, was a deacon (*diake*) in that Mannheim consistory. Although he never lived in New Paltz, Blanchan may well have been, as Ruth Heidgerd surmised, the central person in the founding of the New Paltz community, in 1677. At the time he joined the consistory in Mannheim, he was a recent emigrant from England, where he had been at least until 1647. He was evidently an affluent man, with properties in the Artois and Flanders areas, and perhaps also England, where he worshiped with the Huguenot congregation at Canterbury Cathedral. He may well also have enjoyed some favors from the royal throne, which was occupied by Charles I, brother of that lady Elizabeth who had ruled the Huguenot Rheinpfalz so gracefully thirty years earlier. It seems probable that Blanchan left England because of the unrest created by the Puritan revolution, in which Charles I was beheaded by the English Calvinists.

They were coreligionists of the Huguenots but on different sides politically. Blanchan stayed in Mannheim a little over ten years, and then, in 1660, set sail for America with his wife and children. One of his daughters had a new husband, Antoine Crispell, who would become, seventeen years later, a partner in the New Paltz land venture. They were welcomed by Governor Stuyvesant, after which they proceeded in his yacht up the Hudson to Kingston, then known as Wiltwyck. In 1661, another member of the family, and another future partner, son-in-law Louis DuBois, left Mannheim and joined them. He was accompanied by his wife and family. Two of their sons, Abraham and Isaac, would also be among the twelve men who founded New Paltz. Land was available to settlers, by various governmental means, and Blanchan took advantage of every opportunity.

Before long he became one of the principal landowners in New Dorp, the Dutch name for Hurley, where most of the Huguenot immigrants to Wiltwyck were settled. According to the court records, he, and his son-in-law Louis DuBois, were also rather rambunctious members of the community, a quality perhaps enhanced by their connections with the business of distilling. Blanchan spent much of his time fighting battles in the courts, and did not always win, paying considerable sums in fines. In one action, in fact, he was ordered to remove himself from the area for a year. He appealed and got the order rescinded.

New settlers from Mannheim kept coming, making it seem plausible that before he left that city Blanchan had signed on a number of his friends and relations in a plan to establish their own new community. The Second Esopus War, of 1663, delayed that plan somewhat, as several of Blanchan's children, including the daughter married to Louis DuBois, were captured in the encounter indelibly recorded in the chronicles of New Paltz. The captives were released in the spring.

Simon and Andries LeFevre and Jean Hasbrouck came from the Mannheim area in 1665. Then, in 1675, Hugo Freer, Christian Deyo and his son Pierre and Pierre's three sisters--all of whom later married members of the Duzine--left Mannheim and joined the Hurley community. With them for all or part of the way was the key recruit, Abraham Hasbrouck. Louis Bevier arrived in 1677, barely in time to be counted in.

Abraham Hasbrouck, New Paltz tradition holds, had been a soldier under Edmund Andros, who became Royal Governor of New York in 1674, and thus was able to help much in

securing the royal patent. So entangled were the politics of that time that the tradition is hard to verify, but we know that Andros served as “gentleman in ordinary” in 1660 to 1662 to that same Elizabeth Stuart who had once ruled the Paltz and for a few months Bohemia with the Winter King. Those were her last years, spent in England in considerably reduced circumstances, though she received late some kindnesses from her nephew on the English throne, Charles II. Shortly before he came to America, Andros also served in England’s war with the Netherlands, from 1672 to 1674. Abraham Hasbrouck might have served with him then, though he would have been very young.

The possible connection of Hasbrouck with Elizabeth and thus the Pfalz through Andros is tempting to accept, even though Elizabeth had left for Bohemia in 1619. And the possible connection with Andros in the Netherlands is also tempting because it suggests that Hasbrouck served in Andros’s most famous regiment, which was the first to be armed with the bayonet.

At any rate all the “Twelve Men,” as they were called in English language documents, the men who founded the community of New Paltz, came through Mannheim before embarking for America. It is not surprising, then, that when they first saw the land by what we now know as the Wallkill River, they named it the Paltz River, spelled

by the Dutch *p-a-l-s*, or *p-a-I-s-e*. For the view of the Shawangunks people see across the Wallkill is much like what one gets of the Heidelberg area and the mountain ridge on which it is based along the Neckar River between Mannheim and Heidelberg.

The river is no longer the Paltz, perhaps because the town took the name, though that name at first was neither German nor English, but French. The name given in the record of the first meeting of the Paltz church, in 1683, is *Nouveau Palatinat*, French for New Paltz. That was given, it is said, by Christian Deyo--the patriarch of the settlement.

It took many years before the name became standardized with the English *New* and the Mannheim *Paltz*. In fact the principal spelling of the name Paltz at first was the Dutch *Palls* or *Palse* or the rather French *Palle*. I cannot explain how, but eventually the Mannheim pronunciation won out and shared the name with the English language.

As for Mannheim, it was destroyed again not long after Matthew Blanchan and friends made their timely departure. From 1673 till 1695 the city was the site of deprivations by the armies of Louis XIV. One can still see today, however, as I did on a visit to Mannheim

--which happens to be my wife’s natal city--in October of 1993 some of the plan on which Mannheim was laid out in 1606. This in spite of the destructions of the Holy Roman Empire and the French and, I hesitate to say, Allied bombers in World War II. Its machine tool industry across the Neckar in Ludwigshafen made it a favorite target for air attack.

The layout of the streets, however, is something I have never seen before. Each square block in the city center bears a letter and a number. Our hotel when we stayed there was in the block, or *Quadrat*, numbered P5, and every doorway on that square block bore that number plus its own consecutive number. Thus our hotel was P5-6. Our first day in town, I went to find the

home of my wife's cousin, which was S6--26, only a few blocks away, and amazingly simple to find. The city was rebuilt in Quadrat style early in the eighteenth century.

But that is off the point. To get back to the point, as we came into Mannheim from north Germany, we sat near three ladies of our years and chatted in English and my wife's better German. When we told them we were from a place called New Paltz and that it was a Huguenot town, they were very pleased. Two of them immediately let us know that they were descended from Huguenots. Two out of three, some may agree, is a better average per Huguenot than we are apt to find on the Arrow Bus to New Paltz. At any rate, from what has been recorded here, some may understand better why that part of Route 32 in town bears the name Manheim Boulevard. They may also be able to understand why the single *n* in the name is not a misspelling of the German, but a correct rendering of the way the French spell the name.

¹ I am grateful for the dedicated work of Francis Devos, of Hazebrouck, France, who has, since the year 2000, supplied me with endless amounts of information on the 16th-century experiences of Huguenots in what is now Belgium and northern France. An important source for Devos has been Charles Edmond Henri de Coussemaker's *Troubles religieux du XV^e siecle dans la Flandre Maritime, 1560-1570* (Torhout, Belgium: Flandria, 1887).

² See John Lothrop Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (London: Frederick Warne & Co, 1885) for the long history of the Netherlands and its long successful fight for independence from Spanish rule, a success in which the provinces of Flanders, Artois and Hainaut did not share.

³ See William Elliot Griffis, *The Story of the Walloons*, (Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1923) p. 8: "Probably two thirds of the inhabitants of New Netherland, called 'Dutch,' were from the southern or Belgic part of the seventeen provinces—Flemings who spoke Dutch and Walloons whose speech was French; but all held the Reformed Christian faith based on the deathless literature found in the Bible. In religion, the 'Walloons' from Belgium and the 'Huguenots' from France were one, as were the Puritans and the Pilgrims."