

The Heyligers in the Windwards

By Will Johnson

Many of you will remember the Roman Catholic Priest Father Alphie Heyliger. But most people do not know the history of the Heyliger family in these islands.

Henry B. Hoff in his introduction to his article on the “American Connections of The Heyliger Family of the West Indies has the following to say: “The purpose of this article is to outline known American connections of the Heyliger family. This is not intended to be a full genealogy of the Heyligers, one of the few West Indian families to be the subject of a recent well-documented genealogy. The family lived primarily on six of the Leeward Islands: the Dutch islands of St. Eustatius, St. Martin and Saba and the Danish (now U.S.) Virgin Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. This article also provides a genealogical bibliography for the six islands.



The Coat of Arms of the Heyliger family

“An indication of the close relationship between the six islands and the United States is the fact that 75% of the Heyliger males in the third generation either came to the United States or apparently had descendants who did. Not surprisingly, trade (especially sugar) was the basis of this relationship. West

Indian merchants in New York and Boston married American women while New York merchants on St. Eustatius and St. Croix married West Indian women. Moreover, the economic decline of the six islands in the 19th century caused many West Indians to immigrate to the United States. Another reason for the relationship was education. Impressed by the missionary work of the Moravians in the Danish Virgin Islands, many local planters sent their children to the Moravian schools in Bethlehem, Pa. In addition a few sons were sent to American colleges.



Theodore Godet Heyliger (1790-1845) from a lithograph of Miss Maude Pandt

“ The founder of the Heyliger family in the West Indies was Guilliam Heyliger (died circa 1734) who evidently was on St. Eustatius by about 1670 when he married Anna Ryckwaert. From her surname it appears that she was the granddaughter of Mathieu Ryckwaert who was among the first settlers on the island in 1636. As St. Eustatius was colonized by the Zeeland Chamber of their Dutch West India Company, it is likely that both Guilliam Heyliger and Mathieu Ryckwaert came from Zeeland or Flanders.

Guilliam and Anna (Ryckwaert) Heyliger had six sons and five daughters, and their descendants subsequently formed one of the largest families on the six islands.”

Mr. R.H. Calmeyer did an extensive study on the Heyliger and other related families from which he is descended. It is in Dutch and entitled “The Heyliger Generation” Planters, Ship Owners and Regents in the Windward Antilles.



Theodore Godet Heyliger of Saba, seated (1834 - 1907) Kings Attorney.

By order of Jan Snouck from Vlissingen who as “patron” had obtained a charter from the West India Company, came Pieter van Courcelles on 25 April 1636 on board of an armed cruiser accompanied by a herring boat in the roadstead of the uninhabited Caribbean island St. Eustatius (originally called by him

New Zealand) and took possession of the island. His troop debarked, consisting of the lieutenant Abraham Adriaensen (one my (WJ)'s ancestors), the flag bearer Matieu Rijckewaert, Jan Haet, supposedly the secretary, Hans Musen, commies on behalf of the Chamber of Zeeland of the West India Company, the surgeon Louis Thomas, and further 1 sergeant, 3 corporals, 25 armed citizens, and 6 boys. Van Courcelles became Commander; the four first mentioned formed the Judiciary. This body later became the Council, consisting of five of the inhabitants of St. Eustatius (and from 1721 -1733 also of Saba) to be appointed by the Commander from ten nominated persons by the citizens, as well as the captain or lieutenant-captain of the citizens, who" qualitate qua" was a member. The latter replaced the Commander in his absence. Even though the members of council were appointed for life, it became customary, that they made their seats available on the arrival of a new Commander. The citizens then presented a double amount, from which – expecting in special circumstances – usually the same people were reappointed. The Council assisted the Commander in an advisory role and was then also known as the Council of Policy and Criminal Justice, charged with the administration of justice which took place in accordance with the laws of Zeeland. The Commander had an official at his disposal with the title of Secretary.



. *William James Heyliger, famous boatman, great-grandfather of Commisioner Theodore Heyliger.*

In contrast to the situation on Curacao where they had a regime of civil servants, a situation developed especially on St. Eustatius completely modeled after the situation in Holland, whereby an oligarchy of the elite developed that helped each other in the saddle and kept them there. From the original simple colonists in the 18th century when St. Eustatius became the “Golden Rock” powerful regents held the reins, among whom the Heyliger’s played the first violin. As “primus inter pares” they occupied along with the three other families the de Windt’s, Doncker’s and Lindesay’s, with their extended families, all seats on the Council and most public functions, as well as the positions of Commanders and Vice Commanders. Aforementioned island was also, because of the prime location for sailing vessels, in the first place a commercial center, whereby in 1779, with the transit trade with the British colonies, the top figure of 3551 vessels were given clearance from the harbor. The Heyliger’s took part herein, in family companies, an important part and even had their own large sailing fleets which carried on trade even unto the Mediterranean Sea. Besides that they were the family which owned the most plantations. In 1775 they owned 15 of the 75 plantations on St. Eustatius. On St. Maarten the government developed along the same lines whereby from 1748 onwards three generations of Heyliger’s played a leading role, but here the prosperity remained more moderate, though more stable, based on sugar cultivation, livestock raising, and gathering of salt.



Johannes Heyliger (1736 to 1786) From a Painting in the family Church

When at St. Eustatius on September 30th, 1779 Adriana Heyliger, daughter of Johannes Heyliger and Elizabeth Molineux, married to William Moore, the teacher J. Hall made a document which was

decorated with the coat-of-arms of the bridal couple of Heyliger and “Moore, descended from the earls of Drogheda.” It contains a legendary tale concerning the forebears of the family Heyliger (according to the document in former times also spelled as Highlegger, Highlager, Hylager or Hilygar) descended from three brothers who had been knighted by Charles the Great and presented with the following coat-of-arms.

“On a shield argent quarterly. In the first grand quarter three human hearts flamboyant-guies. In the second a cross potent-azure. In the first inferior quarter three passion naies azure. In the second inferior quarter a demi Catharine wheel pierced in point by a sword proper guies. The crest is a demi Catherine wheel pierced in point by a sword proper also guies. The motto is “Cor magnum timit nihil.” In the Sands papers in The New York Historical Society a female descendant of Catharina Heyliger (1721-1799) and her husband Bertram Pierre de Nully there is a history of the Heyliger family.



William Moore, uitgegeven van Adriaan Heyliger
1758-1800
Nieuw-nederlandsche vertaaling in 1820 van de laatste Mededeeling
of State of Schotland, laatste verkiezingen uitgegeven



Adriaan Heyliger, uitgegeven van William Moore
1784-1844
Nieuw-nederlandsche vertaaling in 1820 van de laatste Mededeeling
of State of Schotland, laatste verkiezingen uitgegeven

Adirana More born Heyliger

One of the family members Johannes Heyliger was Governor of Berbice (1764-1767). The Heyligers intermarried with other prominent families such as the French Huguenot Godet family. And so for example we had at the same time a Theodore Godet Heyliger living on Saba while at the same time there was one living on St. Eustatius. The one on Saba died on October 16th, 1907 at the age of 73. He was born on July 2nd, 1834. His father was Engel Heyliger and his mother was Rebecca Beaks Dinzey. His wife was Ann Louisa Simmons. Her mother Ann Fantose Taylor was from Scotland. I have their family bible at home. The one on St. Eustatius Theodore Godet Heyliger was born on Statia on October 3rd, 1854 and died on April 18th, 1935 at the age of 80. His parents were Gideon Godet Heyliger and Ann Rebecca Holm. His wife was Isabella Cornelia Hodge who at the time of his death was living in the United States. The name Gideon Godet Heyliger also existed on Saba. He married Mary Every. The Heyligo name was also given to former slaves. However the name eventually became Heyliger. Gideon’s son was

William James Heyliger a famous boatman. The Heyliger family was also prominent on Saba. Theodore Godet Heyliger was the Kings Attorney and Engel Heyliger was also prominent here. They intermarried with the Simmons, the Dinzeys and so on.

The last of the old white Heyligers on Saba was Mr. "Dory" or Theodore Sidgismund Heyliger who in 1900 married to Leila Winfield and when she died he married Olive Simmons, but he had no children. Mr. Dory's parents were John Joseph Dinzey Heyliger (brother of Theodore Godet Heyliger) and his mother was Mary Ann Simmons. Where the Windward Islands Bank is now located in The Bottom was the former location of Mr. Dory's Rum shop and Grocery Store. The name Engel also frequently appears in the Heyliger family both on Saba and on St. Eustatius.

The Heyligers had their good times as well as their bad ones. The following letter resembles one of those face book episodes and is worthy of presenting to our readers.

At the age of 15 Adriana Heyliger was asked to marry the sixty year old rich merchant Charles Haggart, to which request her mother Elisabeth Molineux widow of Johannes Heyliger was in favour. The daughter had made up her own mind and her choice fell on William Moore. They eloped and were married on September 30th, 1769. The rejected lover and the aggrieved mother sought consolation with each other and they in turn married each other and had a son. This led to a break in relations between mother and daughter. Years later Adriana Moore (born Heyliger) now being in not the best of financial circumstances decided to write the following letter to her mother who was now living in Scotland.

The letter is dated St. Eustatius, November 24th, 1815 and reads as follows:

"Dear Mother,

For the last time does your unfortunate daughter takes up the pen to address you urged by no mercenary motive, but by feelings deeply wounded by injustice and unmerited neglect. Has my conduct ever brought a blush in your cheek for an unworthy daughter? Have I ever offended you except in the single instance of preferring the man I loved to one more wealthy? No, with truth I can say I never have. Why then have I been treated as if I was a disgrace to you? Why then has the only surviving child of the man who sacrificed his fortune and his health for you and yours been so cruelly forgotten and overlooked. Mother I now no longer look for anything from you, but I think I have a right to remind you of a few facts which you seem to have entirely forgotten. When my Father married you he was independent and had good expectations from his Parents. That independence the portion of which came to him on the death of his mother and a great deal of what he had a right to on the demise of his Father went to extricate your family in Montserrat out of their difficulties. The consequence was that he left his children thousands poorer. Of all his fortune you never gave me a single piece, for even a few chairs, the use of which you gave me, my husband had to pay the value of on your being about to quit the island – you disposed of many fine Tradesmen, the property of my different brothers and I was not one dollar the better for it. May I justly ask you if Mr. Thomas Haggart is more your child than I am that you have made over all that you are worth to him. I wish not for a farthing that he can justly call his, but the property which you possessed when you married his father I have a just and right title to, the more so as he does not stand in need of it. What I have written will probably displease, but I owe it to myself and

children to recall those circumstances to your recollection. If you act justly to me and to them I shall be grateful, if not, my poor children will I trust have enough to prevent their being a burden upon their generous friends and at all events they will never ask any favors from my selfish and ungenerous brother

Farewell Mother, my children I am convinced will ever show you the respect that is due to you. For myself I shall never cease to remember that I have a Mother, though that Mother has forgot that she has a daughter. May you enjoy much health and happiness and may that son for whom I have been so unkindly neglected be as attentive and affectionate as I would have been is the fervent wish of your still attached daughter.

Signed:Adriana Moore.

No shaking Mamma. In the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh in her last testament of July 5th, 1817 Mrs. Elisabeth Hagart born Molineux leaves to her son Thomas Haggart the complete inheritance of 21.413.6 pounds. That was a considerable sum of money for those days. Not a word in the will mentions Adriana.

There is much more information on the Heyliger family and the interrelated families. There was also a Peter Heyliger born on St. Eustatius in 1707. He was a plantation owner on St. Maarten in 1728 and also managed there a plantation for his father. In a rebellion against John Phillips on June 17th, 1736, the Vice Commander of St. Maarten, in which the rebels chased him to Scotland, Peter was chosen to captain-lieutenant by the citizens. After he heard from his brother Johannes Heyliger, then Secretary on St. Eustatius that the Council of that island had asked for the help of a Man-o-War from Curacao to come and put down the rebellion, Peter together with two other councilors from St. Eustatius offered his surrender. The aftermath of this rebellion went on until March 20th, 1744 when Johannes Heyliger, who in the meantime had become Commander (Governor) of the three Windward Islands, pardoned all who had taken part in the rebellion. (These documents are in the Bancroft Library in Berkley, California.)

And oh yeah! I nearly forgot this one. And then you have that fellow on St. Maarten known as "The Golden Boy" namely Commissioner Theodore Heyliger carrying on in the tradition of his illustrious ancestors. Not so much the Wathey's who are of more recent vintage, but now that you know something about the Heyliger's you will say to yourself; "No Wonder." If he does well I will tell him more about the Heyligers, if not I will keep the rest to myself."