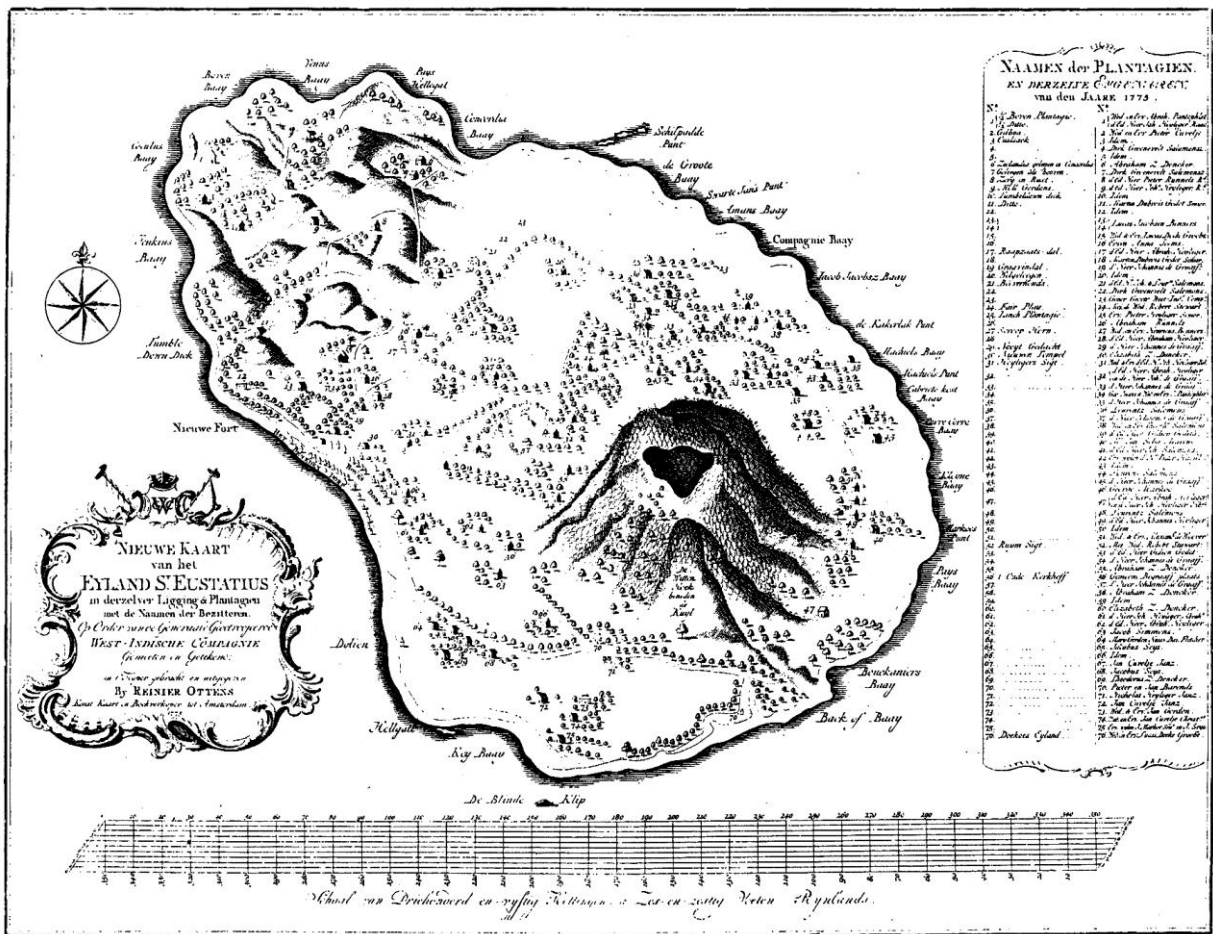


# THE HEYLIGER FAMILY

1648 - 1848



The Dutch West India Company's "New Map of the Island of St. Eustatius", by Reinier Ottens, a mapmaker and bookseller of Amsterdam, dated 1775. It lists all 76 plantations on the island in 1775 with the names of their owners and shows their approximate locations.

### Chapter 3.10 The Heyliger Family 1648 - 1848

The Heyligers were a prominent family in the Dutch Caribbean; Adriana Heyliger (1764-1848) was Elinor Semple's great-grandmother. The family descended from two Dutch merchants, Guljaem Heyliger and Mathias Rijkwaart, of the Zeeland chamber of the Dutch West India Company (DWIC), who were posted to the West Indies in 1636. The Mormon Church database and records in the Dutch National Archives by Michael Calmeyer (1895-1990)<sup>1</sup> were used to determine a family tree. Michael Calmeyer was a member of the extended Heyliger family, being a great-grandson of Raapzaat Moore, one of Adriana Semple's brothers, and therefore a third cousin of my father's generation. Having reached the rank of Lieutenant-General in the Dutch Army, Michael Calmeyer subsequently went into Dutch politics. The Dutch National Archives hold Michael Calmeyer's old notebooks in a voluminous file which can be seen by anybody who cares to make a visit to The Hague – fluency in Dutch is of course necessary to be able to read them. The Heyliger family tree is shown in Ch.3.10a Appendix A (Heyliger); it corresponds with the Heyliger family website<sup>2</sup>. It is perhaps worth recording here that St. Eustatius had a large Jewish population in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Oranjestad's old synagogue, the Honen Dalim, the remains of which can still be seen, was the second oldest in the New World. It seems highly likely that the Salomons family shown in 3.10a were Dutch Jews of Sephardic origin. This is the only evidence found so far of Jewish blood in the Goffey family.

The early seventeenth century era is significant, since the end of hostilities between the Netherlands and Spain had only been formalized in 1619. This had left seven northern provinces, including Holland and Zeeland, forming the independent Dutch Republic, and ten southern provinces remaining under Spanish control as the Spanish Netherlands. The islands of the Lesser Antilles (St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba) came under the control of the Dutch Republic, since the DWIC (whose property the islands were), was owned by the northern provinces, principally Zeeland and Holland. Censuses of the population were taken by the DWIC authorities at approximately five-yearly intervals; unfortunately these only go back as far as 1688. What little information is given in the lists<sup>3</sup> is encoded showing all male householders, their marital status, with numerical records of children, slaves and slave children. Very few females are listed by name, appearing in the code only by implication according to the householder's marital status; the only females listed by name are widows who are also householders. Burghers and burgheresses are identified and in some lists also debtors and Jews.

The earliest record is a List of Debtors and Creditors of St. Eustatius for 1688 which records Guljaem Heyliger Snr. as a debtor with a debt of 228 lbs of sugar. In 1696 Antony, Jan and Giljaem Heyliger, all burghers, are listed. There are many variations in spelling of Giljaem; these are not my typing errors. Many Heyligers, 12 in all, appear in the list of burghers and burgheresses compiled by Admiral Rodney's forces during the British occupation of 1781. As the title of Michael Calmeyer's document suggests, the Heyligers were what the Dutch called *regenten*, although the word does not have quite the same meaning as the English word "regents". The regents were a wealthy social and political class one step below the old aristocracy during the Dutch Republic period: the burgomasters, administrators, elite merchants

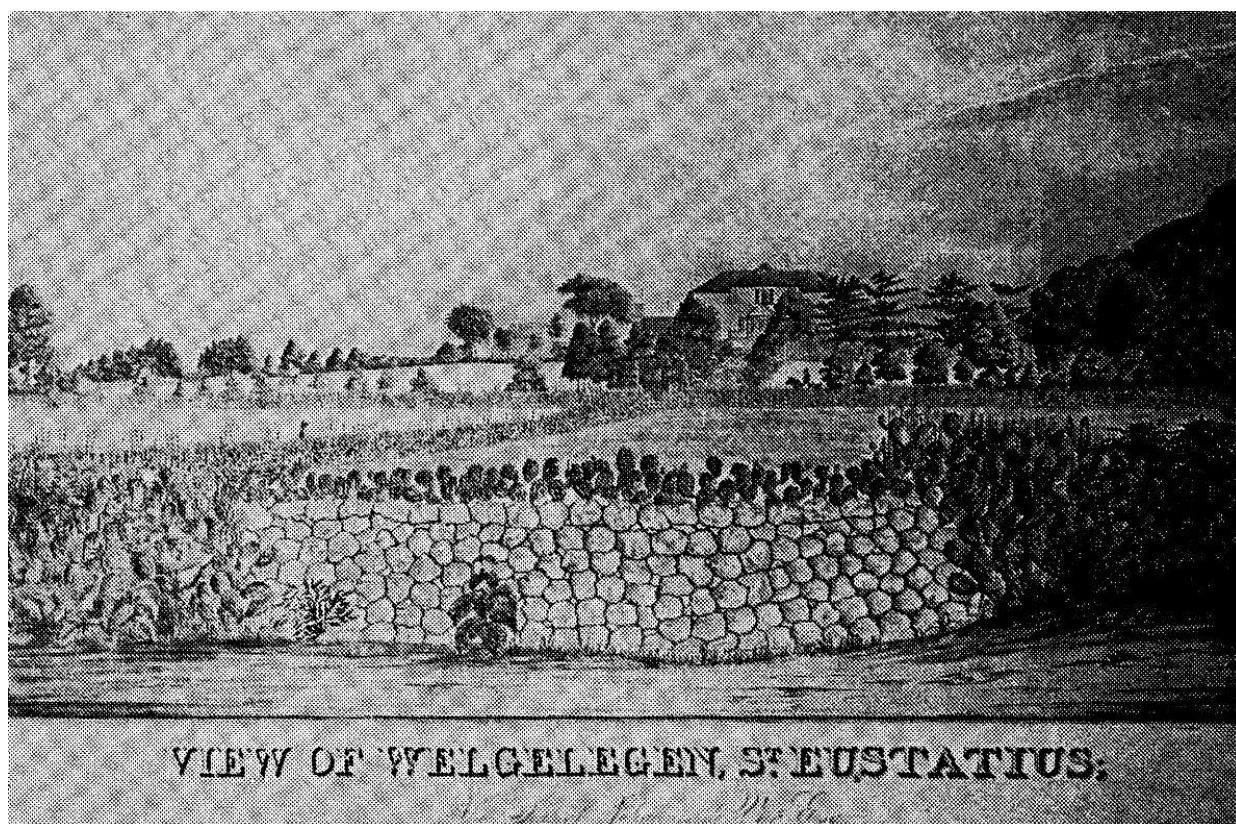
and occupiers of top jobs. They were the main supporters of a political party called the Patriot Party. Heyligers had been governors of St. Eustatius on and off between 1717 and 1736, but were not confined entirely to the islands of the Netherlands Antilles however. In 1738 Pieter and Johannes, two sons of Guljaem Heyliger and Anna Rijkwaart, started buying plantation land on the island of St. Croix in the Danish West Indies, which they ran as absentee landlords from St. Eustatius. The Danish Government at the time was offering inducements to experienced British and Dutch planters to develop their islands' sugar industry and Pieter and Johannes were joined later by their brothers Abraham (1687-1747), Adriana Heyliger's great-grandfather, and Guillian. In 1744 the brothers moved their families, slaves and equipment from St. Eustatius to St. Croix, seeking the security of neutral Danish territory during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48).

Britain, France and the Netherlands were all belligerents in Europe at this time making their West Indian colonies very insecure. A large area in St. Croix known as the King's Quarter, originally owned by the King and Queen of Denmark, had been set aside for plantations, being subdivided into 30 plots, and in 1751 the last 16 of these plots were sold to Johannes and Pieter Heyliger. Pieter told the Danish Governor of St. Croix that he did not intend to die until he and his brothers had 400 slaves on their plantations<sup>4</sup>; in fact by 1753 Heyligers owned 670 slaves on St Croix alone, and more on St Eustatius. In 1767 the plantations in the King's Quarter of St Croix, some 1088 acres in all and shown in Danish records as owned by unnamed heirs of the four Heyliger brothers, were sold to Jan Jacob de Windt, the son of Jan de Windt, Governor of St. Eustatius, and his wife Elizabeth Heyliger.

The Heyliger family were, by 1775 the largest plantation owners on St. Eustatius. The DWIC map of the island, the "Nieuwe Karte" of 1775, shows that out of a total of 76 plantations on the island, Heyligers were the biggest owners with 13 plantations, closely followed by the Salomons family with 10 and Johannes de Graaff (Ch.3.20) with nine and a half. Jacobus Seijs (Ch.3.20), the brother-in-law of Johannes Heyliger (Ch.3.11), owned a modest three and a half. Between them these four related families owned roughly half the island. Mostly the plantations are identified by numbers only, although some are given names. Plantation No. 31, "Heyligers Sigt", was the location of "Welgelegen", the Heyligers' family home, while No.47 was jointly owned by Abraham Heyliger and Johannes de Graaff, his first cousin. Plantation No. 20, owned by Johannes de Graaff, was also called "Welgelegen", a common Dutch name for houses, meaning "wayside". All but two of the owners of plantations shown on the map have Dutch names, suggesting that Dutch regents owned and controlled the island, while the rich merchants, be they Dutch, British, French, Jewish, etc., occupied a lower rung in the hierarchy. Some owners are simply listed by name while others are given the title "d'Heer" or "d'Ed. Heer" (for explanation, see note<sup>5</sup>)

At the time that John Semple and his family were living in Demarara, the Heyligers were a prominent family there also. The Dutch colonial authorities appointed Johannes Heyliger (Adriana Heyliger's great-uncle born on St. Eustatius in 1713) as Governor of Berbice in 1764; '*Johannes Heyliger was a native of St. Eustatius, he had lived in Essequibo and owned in Demarary the properties which are now Werk-en-Rust, La Penitence and Ruimveldt*'<sup>6</sup>. Further information on the Heyliger family in the mainland colony of Essequibo-Demarara are included with the notes regarding John Semple in Chapter 3.13 and in Berbice colony with the notes on Robert and Adriana Semple in Chapter 3.15.

The commercial interests of the Heyliger family were not limited to the West Indies. As large sugar plantation owners, their interests extended into shipping, presumably to enable them to have direct access for their produce to European markets. It is not surprising, therefore, to find members of St. Eustatius's leading family living in Liverpool in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The port of Liverpool was at that time Europe's pre-eminent seaport and the centre of England's cane sugar refining industry. For much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries British naval power was such that many commercial enterprises had little choice but to ship their goods in British-registered ships. It would be no surprise to find that the Heyligers' presence in Liverpool was as part of an operation shipping sugar in Liverpool-registered ships, although this has not been confirmed so far. One Abraham Heyliger was married in St. Peter's Church, Liverpool in 1816; he had been born in St. Eustatius (date unknown) and at least one Heyliger family, who are presumed to be his descendants, can be found in the 1881 national census still living in Liverpool. Many of the European settlers in the Caribbean, including those who had been born there, returned to Europe when it became apparent that the abolition of the slave trade would change their lifestyle forever. The name Heyliger appears to be not uncommon in the Caribbean and it is suspected that this is partly due to the practice of freed slaves taking their masters' names. This is the same process (described in Chapter 3.15) that has led to the name Semple being found in the Litchfield area of Guyana.



**View of 'Welgelegen' by J.S.Heyliger.** Welgelegen, a large 18<sup>th</sup> century plantation house was the Heyligers' family home for many years. It later became the home of the de Veers; Johannes de Veer can be seen riding his horse in front of the house. The house finally burnt to the ground in a fire in 1892.

In the following paragraphs are brief details, derived mainly from ref. 3, concerning the highlighted names of Heyliger ancestors identified in the family tree shown in Appendix 'A':-

**Guljaem Heyliger (1648-1734).** Guljaem Heyliger and his wife, Anna Rijkwaart, were grandchildren of Guljaem Heyliger and Mathias Rijkwaart respectively, two of the original settlers from Zeeland.

**Abraham Heyliger (1687-1747).** Plantation owner on St. Croix and owner of the 'Testemakers' sugar plantation on St. Eustatius. His wife, Maria Salomons, was a daughter of the then Governor of St. Eustatius, Johannes Salomons and I assume her to have been Jewish. On the 'Jewish Magazine' website<sup>7</sup> can be seen an article which describes the origin of the Jews of St. Eustatius as Spain and Portugal in the fifteenth century, i.e. Sephardic Jews. Many migrated to Amsterdam, where attitudes were more tolerant than in England, and were successful in commerce and banking. Some were chosen as migrants to the Antilles in the seventeenth century and were followed much later by Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe.

**Abraham Heyliger (1711-1785).** Owner of the 'Springbaay' plantation on Saba, and the 'de Witte Hoek' (the White Corner), the 'Achter de Berg' (Behind the Mountain), and the 'de Goudsteen' (the Golden Rock) plantations on St. Eustatius. In all, the DWIC's 1775 map shows 13 plantations belonging to various members of the Heyliger family. The 'de Goudsteen' plantation was previously called the 'Raapzaatdaal' (Raapzaat Valley) plantation when it was in the possession of the Raapzaats, Abraham's in-laws, and is shown as No. 17 on the 1775 map. One-time Constable of the Oranje Fort, he was appointed by the West India Company as Governor of St. Eustatius in 1771. During the Dutch Republic period, the DWIC was responsible for the Caribbean colonies, both for governance and defence. Unfortunately the Dutch Republic had little effective central government, it was a confederation of seven semi-autonomous provinces (the Estates) all of which were represented in the Estates General, an organisation dominated by the Estates of Holland. Nobody knew who was responsible for what, but as long as they were all making money, nobody seemed to care. Oranjestad had been designated a "free port" by the Estates General in 1753, meaning the island could trade with anybody. This included trade with Britain's enemies in time of war provided the Netherlands remained neutral, an arrangement agreed in a treaty with Britain in 1676. Britain objected strongly to Abraham Heyliger's behaviour in promoting the arms trade with the rebellious colonies of North America during the American War of Independence, and in 1776 the DWIC was forced by British pressure to remove him from his position as Governor of St. Eustatius. In 1785, shortly before he died, Abraham was appointed Governor of the three Dutch islands of the Lesser Antilles, (St. Eustatius, Saba and St. Maarten).

**Johannes Heyliger (1739-1776).** Little is known about Johannes or the source, or extent, of his wealth. We do know however, that whatever fortune he had was lost in his attempts to build a life for his wife and family on the island of Montserrat, and in supporting the Molineuxs in their financial difficulties - see Chapter 3.11. He became Constable of the Oranje Fort on St. Eustatius in 1771 and from 1772 to 1776 was "Secretaris" of the island, a post which, statistically at least, might be considered as Governor-in-Waiting. He moved to Tortola in the British Virgin Islands for his health in 1776 and died there later that year, aged 37.

**Adriana Heyliger (1764-1848).** Due to the premature death of her father, Johannes, in 1776, Adriana was in a good position to inherit some of the wealth of her grandfather when he died in 1785. Adriana's inheritance from her parents, however, was a bone of contention between her and her mother, with whom she was not on good terms; in the event Elizabeth Molineux disinherited Adriana, her only surviving child by her first husband Johannes Heyliger. By 1794 Adriana's three brothers had all died leaving money either to Adriana or to her children. Her legacy(ies) from her brothers and paternal grandfather was(were) used by her husband, William Moore, to buy the '*de Goudsteen*' plantation in 1791; this subject is covered more fully in Chapters 3.11 and 3.14.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Het geslacht Heyliger: planters, reders en regenten op de Bovenwindische Antillen. M.R.H. Calmeyer 1973  
Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague, Netherlands, JaarDeel 27:97-18

<sup>2</sup> [www.heyligerfamily.org](http://www.heyligerfamily.org)

<sup>3</sup> [www.swipnet.se](http://www.swipnet.se). (Note: Much of the information on this site concerning the Heyliger family has been derived from the work of Michael Calmeyer in the document ref. (1) above, and others).

<sup>4</sup> Virgin Islands Daily News, 1<sup>st</sup> Aug.1975. "History Corner" by Inge Mejer Antonsen

<sup>5</sup> "d'Heer" and "d'Ed. Heer" are translated by my translator as the equivalent of "Mr." and "Esq.", respectively. This does not explain why most of the names omit the customary d'Heer. Speculation can be found on the internet that these titles, being restricted to Governors and ex-Governors, are honorifics more comparable with "The Honourable" and "The Right Honourable".

<sup>6</sup> Centenary History and Handbook of British Guiana. A.R.F. Webber

<sup>7</sup> [JewishMag.com/history/TheJews of StEustatius](http://JewishMag.com/history/TheJews%20of%20StEustatius)