

Grietje Reyniers

Born 1602 in Amsterdam, Estates-General of the United Provinces (Netherlands). Died 1669 or before in Gravesend, Kings Co., New York. Married 1st Aelbert Egberts. Married 2nd Anthony Jansen Van Salee on board ship.

Some sources say marriage date was 16 Dec 1629. Some also have her first name spelled Grietjen or Grietse.

Described as the first prostitute of New Amsterdam. "Manhattan's first and most famous prostitute."

The fictional novel *The Drowning Room* by Michael Pye (Penguin Books, NY 1995) is based on her. It was an excellent, if at times confusing (in a good way) story, I would recommend it for any mature reader unless you are going to be researching her yourself. The only reason for that caveat is because he did such an excellent job of blending fictional elements with historically confirmable facts, that makes it difficult after reading it to keep straight which parts were fiction and which facts. The story begins after the death of Anthony "The Turk" (though he actually outlived her in reality, but it makes for an interesting psychological starting point) and the wait for the spring thaw to bury him, during which she tells her life story.

Most stories claim they (Anthony and her) got married enroute across the Atlantic, though some say they met in New Amsterdam and simply went aboard to get married. Those that claim they met in New Amsterdam say she came aboard the *Soutberg* but even these stories contradict themselves with some saying she filed suit against two sailors who used 'crude' language at her, while others (the Van der Zee's) say "... *she was not mean with her favors, so I assume she traveled first class* and a witness testified that as the *Soutberg* left to return to Amsterdam he had heard the crew call out to Grietse, "*Whore, Whore two pound's butter whore*" whereupon she lifted up her petticoat and [turning to] the crew pointed to her behind and slapped her backside saying: "*Blaes my daer achterin.*"

Other stories of testimonials say that *Grietse had previously entered Fort Amsterdam and announced: "I have long enough been the whore of the nobility; from now on I shall be the whore of the rabble, and having two children with her said: I shall take these bastards right away and dash their brains out against the wall."*

Francis Ferraro at GenForum writes:

The marriage certificate describes Grietje as "from Wesel, Germany", although her parents were both from the Netherlands. Various authors insinuate that she used her wiles on him, being older than he, but he never seemed to mind. She apparently worked in a tavern in the Netherlands as a young woman, but she was fired for acting inappropriately. Given the

reputations of taverns in the Renaissance, one wonders what she did that was so bad as to get her fired. She was also an argumentative woman, so perhaps was the perfect match for Anthony, who enjoyed a good lawsuit against his neighbors.

Excerpts from the New York Genealogical and Biographical Record by Hazel Van Dyke Roberts, dated variously October 1969 & January 1972:

...Grietje Reyniers, who according to the testimony of another ancestor, Cornelis Lambertse Cool, was discharged for improper conduct when a waiting girl at Peter de Winter's tavern in Amsterdam.

...Professor Leo Hershkowitz in the October, 1966 number of the Quarterly of the New York State Historical Association tells her story (pp- 301-306) as gospel in all its ugly details, despite his statement that gossip and slander were the custom of the town. Notwithstanding this he accepts without question the gossip of the midwife who said that Grietje asked whether her child looked like her husband or Andries Hudden. After all, whatever her character, Grietje does not seem to have been stupid, and it is a question if she would so openly have carried on an affair that a husband from Morocco would scarcely have tolerated. Told that the child was brown skinned, she is said to have accepted the fact that the child was that of her husband! Anthony had business dealings with Hudde later, and his probable brother was a partner in the purchase of a plot of land on Long Island with one Peter Hudde. It seems more likely that, as does any new mother, she asked whom the child looked like, meaning father or mother, and that the midwife deliberately added the statement which Hershkowitz accepted as a fact, despite the slander which he declares to have been omnipresent.

The records of the Gemeente-Archief in Amsterdam show that on 26 September 1626 Grietje Reyniers of Amsterdam, aged twenty-four years, parents unnamed, assisted by her cousin, Heyltge Gerrits Schaeck, married Aelbert Egberts, from Haarlem, a tailor, aged twenty years, having no father, and assisted by his mother, Hillegond Cornelis. The records further show that on 15 December 1629 Grietje Reyniers, from Wesel, Germany, widow of Aelbert Egberts for over two years, and Anthony Jansz, seaman from Cartagena, aged twenty-two years, parents not named, received a certificate allowing them to get married "on board." Thus Grietje was about five years Anthony's senior.

Whether Grietje Reyniers was Dutch or German remains uncertain. Her name indicates that the family was of Huguenot descent. That she was of Amsterdam at the time of her first marriage seems to suggest Dutch origin. From Russel Shorto's "The Island at the Center of the World: The Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony That Shaped America" (Vintage Books, NY: 2004):

"There was a kind of duke and duchess of the era of New Amsterdam, who outdid their neighbors for sheer rabble-rousing. Back in Europe, Griet Reyniers had worked as a barmaid at the tavern of Pieter de Winter in Amsterdam. In fact, she practiced two professions at once- the mistress of

the tavern once spotted her in a back room' "her petticoat upon her knees," sekually servicing a party of soldiers. It's impossible to say whether the young Wouter van Twiller wandered into her establishment one evening and became enamored of her. All we know is that when he set sail for Manhattan on de Zoutberg ("Salt Mountain"), Griet was on board, too, ready to seek her fortune in a new land. It was a hazardous crossing: the ship was nearly captured by "Turks," and then it turned the tables and took the prize of a Spanish bark whose hulls were crammed with sugar. Griet was unfazed by the goings-on, and plied her trade at sea- passengers noticed her pulling "the shirts of some of the sailors out of their breeches." Landing at Manhattan and finding it, so to speak, virgin territory, she set up shop. She took to walking the Strand, hiking her petticoats to display her wares for the sailors. If she had come as Van Twiller's mistress, it may have been as a result of his finally dismissing her that she was observed marching into the fort one day crying out, "I have long enough been the whore of the nobility. From now on I shall be the whore of the rabble!"

May 11, 1647 at the celebrations of Kieft's replacment: "Anthony "The Turk" van Salee and his wife Griet Reyniers - both respectable now, but still cantankerous - and their four daughters" (pg 165)

Four Children from 2nd marriage, plus possibly two more not from marriage:

- . Cornelia
- . Sara
- . Annica Van Salee
- . Eva Antonis Jansen