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De Sille Family

## TREASURES AT THE NYG&B: THE DE SILLE BIBLE

by Thomas J. Prendergast

While the De Sille Family Bible is one among thousands of publications in the NYG&B Library, it most certainly qualifies as one of our "Treasures." Printed in 1614 by Jan Jantz of Arnhem, The Netherlands, it contains the Old and New Testaments and the Books of the Apocrypha.<sup>1</sup>

Weighing about thirty pounds, it is 18 inches in length, 12 inches wide and 7 inches thick, with covers made of wood, each about one-quarter inch thick. It has copper corner clasps and five strands of cord binding. The remains of a leather strap and buckle are still attached. The covers were originally encased in leather that has suffered some decay, but enough survives to show gold-embossed lettering revealing the name of the original owner, Laurens de Sille of Arnhem, who acquired it in 1619.<sup>2</sup>



The DeSille Bible

During the next 338 years the Bible had many owners, all descendants of Laurens de Sille. On June 5, 1957, Mrs. George Austin Beardsley, eleven generations removed from her eighth great-grandfather, entrusted this precious volume to the keeping of The New York Genealogical and Biographical Society.

Following is a list of the known owners of the Bible, the date they obtained it, if known, their relationship to the immediate previous owner, and their descent from Laurens de Sille.

1. Laurens de Sille, 1619, Arnhem.
2. Gerardina de Sille Casembroot, 1637, The Hague (L's daughter).
3. Nicasius de Sille (brother of Gerardina), 1649, The Hague and New Amsterdam (L's son).
4. Nicasius Kip (grandson of Nicasius de Sille), 1672, New Utrecht (L's great-grandson).

<sup>1</sup> There is a brief note about the Bible in "Notes and Queries," *Record* 20 (1889):190. A transcript of the family record was published as "Nicasius de Sille Bible," *Publications of the Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania* 7 (1918):127-28.

<sup>2</sup> On de Sille see Catherine T.R. Mathews, "The de Sille Family of Holland," *Record* 34 (1903):24-28, 146, and William J. Hoffman, "De Sille" [part of his *Armory of American Families of Dutch Descent*], *Record* 64 (1933):13-15. Hoffman lists four generations prior to Laurens.

5. Anna de Sille (mother of Nicasius Kip, daughter of Nicasius de Sille), New Utrecht (L's granddaughter).
6. Jan Gerritse van Kouwenhoven and his wife Gerardina de Sille (brother-in-law and sister of Anna de Sille), 1675, Brooklyn Ferry (L's granddaughter).
7. Gerardina van Couwenhoven (granddaughter of Jan and Gerardina), 1722 and her husband, Symon van Wicklen, The Raretans, Somerset County, New Jersey (L's great-great-granddaughter).<sup>3</sup>

The gift of the Bible to Gerardina van Couwenhoven upon her marriage into the Van Wickle(n) Family prior to 25 November 1722<sup>4</sup> is the last transfer that we know of until about 150 years later when Jacob C. Van Wickle presented it to his nephew George W. Wood in 1870, as noted inside its front cover and will be discussed below. The names of others who possessed the Bible during the intervening decades may be added later.

8. Jacob C. Van Wickle II (b. 1805), (great-grandson of Gerardina van Couwenhoven and Symon van Wicklen), Old Bridge, New Jersey (L's five times great grandson).<sup>5</sup>
9. George Wisner Wood, 1870, Baltimore, nephew of Jacob C. Van Wickle (L's six times great grandson).<sup>6</sup>
10. Sarah H. and Viola A. Wood, daughters of Geo. W. Wood & Laura Alexander (L's seven times great granddaughters).
11. Florence A. Pope Beardsley, 1942, East Orange, NJ, 2nd cousin (once removed) of Sarah H. & Viola (L's eight times great granddaughter).<sup>7</sup>
12. The New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, 1957.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible has many inscriptions relating to its ownership, the recording of births and deaths, some marriages and a few notations. The de Sille and Van Kouwenhoven families did not record vital records, but they did inscribe most of the very valuable historical data about the Bible itself. The Van Wickle(n) family made the majority of the entries regarding births, marriages, etc., during the approximately one hundred fifty years they were in possession. The title page of each Book of the Bible was a popular place to record information, but many inscriptions appear elsewhere. The publisher's mark with

<sup>3</sup> A 1904 article in the *Baltimore American* states, "... the Bible passed to Gerardina, his granddaughter, who married Symon van Wickelen ..." This article mistakenly names Wolfert Gerritse Van Kouwenhoven as Gerardina's grandfather, rather than Jan Gerritse Van Kouwenhoven, from whom the Bible passed to Gerardina.

On the van Kouwenhovens who had the Bible see Lincoln C. Cocheu, "The Van Kouwenhoven-Conover Family," *Record* 71(1940):70 (Jan Gerritse), 274-75 (Nicasius), and 82 (1951):220-21 (Gerardina).

On Simon Van Wickle(n) and his children see Harry Macy, Jr., "The Van Wicklen/Van Wickle Family," *Record* 128 (1997):249-52. Later generations will be found at [www.vanwicklin.com](http://www.vanwicklin.com)

<sup>4</sup> For this date see Macy, *Record* 128(1997):250.

<sup>5</sup> [www.vanwicklin.com](http://www.vanwicklin.com), compiled by John Van Wicklin based on research by Harry Macy, Jr.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; and Conover, David Kipp, *Descendants of Wolfert Gerritse van Kouwenhoven*, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~conover/conover-pf1715.htm#i138866>

<sup>8</sup> "Bible of Nicasius de Sille 1610-1674," *Record* 89 (1958):54, and stamped accession date of June 5, 1957, in Bible.

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**THE DeSILLE BIBLE** (continued)

the words, "Tot Arnhem, By Jan Jantz. Boeckvercooper/ Anno 1614" is imprinted at the beginning of each Book. On one page, delicately drawn hands point to what must have been favorite passages of the beholder.

The handwritten information begins inside the Bible's front cover. Two sheets of paper have been pasted to the wood of the cover and, unfortunately, to each other, thereby concealing what is written on the bottom sheet. The top sheet contains an interesting variety of information – historical, contemplative and symbolic. The upper portion of the page is missing due to tearing and flaking. The first entry is largely lost because of this deterioration, but Mr. Willem van Kouwenhoven of Arnhem, the Netherlands, a member of the NYG&B and the Van Kouwenhoven-Conover Family Association, has examined the inscription and finds it is a quotation from II Peter 1:19, written in Dutch and translated (from the original Greek as given in the Revised Standard Version of 1946), as follows:

"And we have the prophetic word made more sure.  
You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp  
Shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning  
Star rises in your hearts."

The next entry is intact and refers to the Book of Exodus 20 verse 2, and the Book of Deuteronomy 5 verse 8. According to Willem van Kouwenhoven, however, Deuteronomy 5:16 has been copied onto the page instead, without a citation as to the source.

A hand-drawn de Sille Family coat-of-arms is next, topped with the motto, "Silentio & Spe" (With Silence and Hope). Sur-



Logo, hidden page, and transfer of Bible to George W. Wood.

where he built the first stone house in the town.<sup>9</sup> In 1660 he compiled the "de Sille List," an inventory of the occupied buildings within New Amsterdam on 10 July of that year, including the owner and purpose of the structure.<sup>10</sup> The list accompanies the "Castello Plan," an invaluable historic document.

On the page shown above, an entry placed by Anna de Sille and Jan Gerritse Van Kouwenhoven states that she sold the Bible to him on 20 November 1675 for 10 guilders. It also states that Jan was the sixth owner of the book.

The Kouwenhoven-Conover Family, now scattered throughout the length and breadth of the United States, descends from one of the earliest Dutch immigrants to New Netherland, Wolfert Gerritse van Kouwenhoven. Wolfert arrived in the Colony in 1625 with his wife, Neeltje Jacobsdochter and their sons, Gerrit, Pieter and Jacob.<sup>11</sup>

An elaborate "logo" follows, possibly showing the initials of Jan Gerritse Van Kouwenhoven. To the right of that is an entry in English stating that George W. Wood received the Bible in 1870 from his uncle Jacob C. Van Wickle of Old Bridge, New Jersey.

The Van Wickle Family (also van Wickle(n)/van Wickel/van Wickler/Van Vickle), had a Frisian origin. Founder Jentie Jeppes (Jan Jacobszen de Vries) arrived in New Netherland in 1664 with sons Gerrit and Evert Janszen, and the latter was the father of Symon who married Gerardina van Kouwenhoven and settled on land purchased earlier by Evert in Somerset County, New Jersey.<sup>12</sup>

The lower left portion of the same page is also missing, revealing the page underneath with writing on it. It is not certain that these sheets of paper can be separated from each other in a manner suitable to preserve what is written on both pages.



The DeSille family coat of arms as it appears in the Bible and in a twentieth century rendering.<sup>10</sup>

rounding the coat-of-arms, in Latin, it states: "Nicasius De Sille Age 39 in the year 1649."

Nicasius de Sille arrived in the Colony in 1653 as First Councillor to Director General Peter Stuyvesant, already celebrated as "... a man of unusual acquirements." He was an "author, statesman, lawyer, an expert in military affairs with especial knowledge of fortifications," and more. In 1656 he became Schout Fiscaal, the equivalent of today's state attorney general, and was also a founder and official of New Utrecht,

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, *Record* 64 (1933):14.

<sup>10</sup> Mathews, *Record*, 34 (1903):24.

<sup>11</sup> I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909*, 6 vols. (New York 1915-1928), 2:29.

<sup>12</sup> Cocheu, *Record* 70 (1939):230-35, 353-56.

<sup>13</sup> Macy, *Record* 128 (1997):81-90, 179-84, 249-52.

**THE DeSILLE BIBLE** (continued)

On the opening page of the Old Testament are the names of its first four owners, plus the sixth.

- L. de Sille 1619 *j.v.d* [Doctor of Law(s)]
- Gerardina de Sille 1637 *L. filia* [daughter of Laurens]
- Dr. N de Sille 1649 *G. frater* [Gerardina's brother]
- Nutu Dei* – 1649 [Latin for 'for God's will' or 'by God's will,' perhaps referring to a significant event in Nicasius' life.]
- Nicasius Kip 1672 *Nicasius nepos* [Nicasius' grandson]
- Jan Gerritsoon van Couwenhooven *A's* 1675



First three owners of the DeSille Bible.

On a blank page facing the title page of the New Testament is a list of six Van Wickle family births. Each entry begins with the words, "Anno Dominus" followed by the year and name of the newborn child, then by the month and day of birth, with the words, "Hopes he/she will be raised in the fear of the Lord." The first five newborns came into the world "at Raretans." The sixth baby, Jacob, was born in "Matchponixs." The names are:

- John Van Wickle August 23, 1749
- Simon Van Wickle, February 22, 1752
- Gerredena Van Wickle, June 6, 1754
- Siche Van Wickle, August 10, 1757
- Evert Van Wickle, March 21, 1761
- Jacob Van Wickle, May 10, 1770.

Squeezed between the entries of Simon and Gerredena's births is the notation: "Simon Van Wickle departed this life when he was 74 years old & 2 months." A notation accompanying John Van Wickle's birth entry at the top of the page reads: "He parted this life the 25<sup>th</sup> day December 1829 he being 81 years old 4 months [smeared] days old."

On the title page of the New Testament, the center portion of which is missing (probably a symbolic illustration that was removed), six entries appear. The names "Nicasius de Sille, *j.v.d* 1649," and "Nicasius Kip 1672 *nepos* Nicasius de Sille" are the uppermost entries, repeating two of the names recorded at the beginning of the Old Testament. The third entry again reads "Nicasius" with the rest being blurred. Next are birth notices: "Nicasius Van Wickle born 18<sup>th</sup> December 1769 and Baptized 24<sup>th</sup> June 1770" – "Jacob Van Wickle was born 10<sup>th</sup> May 1770 and Baptized 24<sup>th</sup> June \_\_\_" (looks like 1770 also) – "Syte Van Wickle was born 28 Day of August 177 \_\_\_."

One incomplete wedding record plus seven additional Van Wickle family birth entries appear at the end of the "Boecks Hiobs."

- John Van Wickle and Ann Rue whos married the Year of our Lord Nicolas Van Wickle was born 18<sup>th</sup> December 1769
- Siche Van Wickle was born 26<sup>th</sup> August 1771
- Simon Van Wickle was born 14<sup>th</sup> October 1778
- John Van Wickle was born 7<sup>th</sup> [or 9<sup>th</sup>] April 1776
- Catherine Van Wickle was born 14<sup>th</sup> February 1779
- Nelly Van Wickle was born 8<sup>th</sup> September 1781
- Ann Van Wickle was born 16<sup>th</sup> July 1784

Two Van Wickle family marriages are recorded on the end page of "ghebedts Manaffe." These show that "Ann V Wickle and Jams Morgan Whos Married the 02 Day of October in the yeare of our Lord 1085" (sic); and "Peter Barcklay and Catharine Vanwickle Whos Married the 14 Day of March in the Lord 1087" (sic). These are probably the same Catherine and Ann whose births are noted in the list above. The last entry on this page is the death record of Sarah Hyacinth van Wickle, noted further on.

Another entry involving the name Barclay appears on a page from the Book of the Prophets, stating: "Simon VanWickle Barclay Whos Borne the 2 Day of June 1088" (sic), possibly the son of Peter Barcklay and Catharine Van Wickle mentioned in the previous paragraph.



Birth records of six Van Wickle children.

**THE DeSILLE BIBLE** (continued)

Elsewhere in the Books of the Apocrypha is a page with the entries: "Mary Johnston Van Wickle" followed by "Mary Disbrough" at the top of the page, and at the bottom of the page is a lengthy entry lamenting the passing of a loved one with whom the writer was sitting. After describing the person's weakening "pulce" and his gasping for breath, it concludes, "with a doleful grone he Bids the World adieu." On a nearby page, is stated, "Isaiah Disborough and Mary Van Wickle Whos Married the 7 day of February in the year 1809." It appears that the Mary who is mentioned here three times is the same person, and that she married Mr. Disbrough. It is possible that he is the person whose passage into eternity was witnessed, mourned, and recorded by Mary.

On the same page with the marriage notice of Isaiah and Mary Disborough, another entry relating to the birth of Sarah Hyacinth Van Wickle appears. She ". . . was born on Wednesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1808 at Old Bridge, New Jersey, the daughter of Judge Jacob Van Wickle." On the facing page, it is stated: "Sarah Hyacinth Van Wickle Wife of L.S. Wood departed this life at Nine O'clock P.M. March 23, 1898 in Baltimore, aged 89 years and Six Months." She was the mother of George W. Wood who received the Bible from his uncle,

Jacob C. Van Wickle (Sarah Hyacinth's brother) in 1870, as stated inside the front cover. This is the last entry in the Bible relating to a family event.

The next recording of the transfer of ownership does not appear in the Bible itself, but is written on the margin of a photocopied page containing a newspaper article about the Bible from the *Baltimore American*, written in 1904. It states: "Presented to Florence Pope Beardsley by the daughters of Laura Alexander & George W. Wood - (signed) Sarah H. Wood - Viola A. Wood - April 10th 1942."

Florence Adeline Pope Beardsley, the daughter of James Edward Pope and Amanda Appleby Sutphen, married George Austin Beardsley in 1900. They had three sons, George Austin III, Edward Sutphen Beardsley and Leonard de Sille Beardsley. Through her Appleby ancestors Florence was the great-great granddaughter of Judge Jacob C. Van Wickle, and through him she descended from the Van Kouwenhoven and de Sille families back to the Bible's original owner, Laurens de Sille. She possessed it for some fifteen years before turning it over to the care of the NYG&B in 1957. Mrs. Beardsley's good sense of history and the need to preserve it is further demonstrated by records showing that, in her later years, she donated materials to other appropriate historical societies as well.

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