

## Introduction.

Usually, digging for ancestors often comes to a dead end in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through a combination of various reasons: civil registration has only existed in the Netherlands since about 1811, and in Germany since about 1870; church archives often contain summary information (John marries Mary); surnames as we know them nowadays turn into patronymics (John Peters-son). Amongst amateur genealogists the following rule of thumb applies: you are in luck if you manage to trace your family back to the seventeenth century - unless, of course, that family either belongs to the nobility or is enormously rich; neither is the case with the Gesthuysens.

One stroke of genealogical fortune in our situation is that the name Gesthuysen is described in the historiography of the town of Xanten (Alders, 1983). The person who discovered the passage in that book, to whom honour is due, is Mr. L.W.A. (Lambert) Berenbroek, who was solving genealogical puzzles at the end of the nineteen-seventies. Some of his data came to light in a roundabout way. He laid the foundations for investigating the name Gesthuysen. Unfortunately he passed away in 1999. In addition to the historiography of the town of Xanten, this parish priest Alfons Alders also had an interest in genealogy. Several notes about the Gesthuysens emerged from his estate. These certainly hastened and rounded off our investigations.

Another stroke of luck is that our investigation in Germany is mainly west of the river Rhine. Since 1792 this region is more and more occupied by the French army and being incorporated within the French Republic. Starting September 9, 1800 the French law ordered to divide the region in "Mariën", municipals. In the region around the town Kleve you did see several municipals: Appeldorn, Asperen, Goch, Grieth, Kalkar, Keppeln, Kleve, Ueden and Griethausen (Dahms). The registration service (Zivilstand, l'état civil) do begin in this region with the years VII (1798/99), VIII (1799/1800) of IX (1800/01) of the French calendar, depending on where the villages are situated. After the collapse of the French empire, the last French army did leave the region in January 1814 (Dahms), the registration service is being continued according the French example (Booma 1987).

In contrast to the Netherlands you don't have free access to the registration service in Germany, due to the law ('Datenschutz'). Fortunately not all keepers of the records are that severe.

As early as 1364, mention is made of a property in Gesthuysen. There have presumably been a number of farmhouses in the hamlet of Gesthuysen ever since the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 'Marienbaum, Stifter, Pfarrarchiv, ca. 1361-1805' persons are mentioned, beginning from 1471, having surnames such as Geesthuysen, Geisthuysen, Gesthuisen and Geysthuesen. The main Gesthuysen farmhouse disappeared, presumably in the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century; Lamershof, Heyershof, Wardtshof and Maashof have remained. We do not doubt that all Gesthuysens are descended from here. Gesthuysens lived in Wardtshof until about 1896; Maashof is still (at the start of 2004) occupied by a Gesthuysen.

Of course there are Gesthuysen's who did leave their birth region, descendants live in Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, England, South Africa, Spain and Switzerland, but in the year 2005 90% still do live in the region Duisburg (D) - Wesel (D) - Millingen aan de Rijn (NL) - Goch (D) - Kevelaer (D) - Geldern (D). With that much Gesthuysen's in a small region you could expect it: as far as we do know now there are three married couples where man and wife have the surname Gesthuysen: Cornelis Gesthuysen (\*1758 Alpen) marries 1786 in Alpen with Sybilla Gesthuysen (\*1764 Ginderich), they are cousins ("cum dispensatione in consanguinitate" = dispensation because of blood-relationship). Theodor Gesthuysen (\*1895 Sonsbeck) marries in 1946 with Agnes Gesthuysen (\* Kapellen), the great-great-grandfather of Agnes is the brother of de great-great-great-grandfather of Theodor. Nikolaus Gesthuysen

(born in Veen) marries 1977 in Veen with Hildegard Gesthuysen (born in Labbeck), both their grand-grand grandfathers are brothers.