CHAPTER ELEVEN

A NEW NETHERLAND FAMILY

Marriage

Evert Willemsz committed himself permanently to New Netherland when he married a Norwegian colonist there.¹ At a rather late point, well over the age of thirty, he chose as his wife the widow Anneke Jans—not a large landholder, as she has often been portrayed, but still one of the few women who owned a farm.² With five children from her recently deceased husband, it was reasonable for her to remarry, and perhaps even necessary for the survival of her family. On the other hand, the initial scarcity of women in the colony made every widow highly sought after as a marriage partner. Actually Evert’s choice is more puzzling than hers: a mother of many children, farmer’s widow, Norwegian by birth, with a different mother tongue, and Lutheran besides. For our


² I use in this book the name by which she is currently known in America. In the seventeenth century, her name was spelled Annetgen, Annetie, or in similar forms.
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minister, Anneke certainly had many strikes against her. We are almost forced to conclude that there were very few eligible women to choose from at that moment. The first decades brought no unmarried women to the colony, certainly none in the service of the WIC, and initially no free colonists either. Women came with their husbands or other family members, or they grew up in the colony. But around 1638 there were still very few girls of marriageable age in New Netherland. Only after the war, when the trading post became a full-fledged colony, did the situation change rapidly. For Evert a farmer’s widow was still the only choice. Implicitly he thus also chose for a permanent function overseas. His marriage made him a colonist.

Anna Ians, as she signs her name later, had first immigrated with her mother Tryn (or in the diminutive form customary for women, Tryntgen) Jonas from Norway to Amsterdam and from there she went to the New World.3 Did Tryn cross the ocean together with her daughter? Or was she already living in New Amsterdam, with her other daughter Marritgen, who married the ship’s carpenter Thymen Jansz around 1632? Although Tryn Jonas was present at Anneke’s wedding in Amsterdam in April 1623, she does not appear in the records there as a baptismal witness for her children, not even for the daughter who was named after her in 1629. It is quite possible that Tryn had already left for America with a (second) husband who left no traces in the archives owing to an early death. She certainly could not have lived on the small gratuity she received from the WIC for her services as midwife: that was more likely a supplement to her husband’s income, or to other earnings. This could explain how Anneke Jans and her first husband, the sailor Roelof Jansz, hit on the idea of seeking a better future with their children in the New World. It would also be in keeping with Oliver Rink’s finding that during the first three decades there were never three generations immigrating together.4

As a midwife hired by the WIC, Tryn served the families of Company employees. It is possible that she was already dispatched with the first group of colonists, in or soon after 1624. Her daughter Anneke was married by then, and her other daughter Marritgen may have traveled with her. She must have been forty to fifty years old at the time. But

3 On these persons, see also John O. Evjen, Scandinavian immigrants in New York, 1630–1674 (Minneapolis 1916; repr. Baltimore 1972), 89–110.  