

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

SLCC GEN 0016: Tracing Immigrant Origins

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As the youngest by 14 years of my paternal first cousins, I missed a lot of the juicy van Raaphorst family gossip. And I never heard much family history from my father, either, who was a down-to-earth, practical kind of guy (typical Dutchman!) and not much of a storyteller. My mother, who was a motivated family historian, was my dad's second wife (and a German, to boot!), and was never fully accepted into the van Raaphorst clan.

When I began to do family history research on my own and began to learn more about the family, I was bowled over by the complexity of their immigration story. These people were not at all like my mother's relatives, families who crossed the Atlantic *en masse*, and who forged a new life for themselves and their children in a moderately large New World ethnic community. The van Raaphorsts, by contrast, came as a single, three-generation family, and they had very little outside support. Some family members made a two-year stop in Ontario, Canada, and all members returned to the Old County at least once. As a group they took 15 years to complete their migration!

My most recent efforts to sort out the van Raaphorst family immigration story have been quite successful. The questions I have been most interested in answering are the following:

1. What advantages would a life in Western Ontario and Eastern Michigan have offered the van Raaaphorst family?
2. What family problems or economic hardships in the Netherlands might have given them a strong motivation to leave?
3. What individual characteristics and group strengths have allowed them to successfully complete the journey?
4. What had the family accomplished when the migration was complete?

In this paper I have attempted to demonstrate that there were probably equally compelling “push” and “pull” motivations for the van Raaphorst family to migrate; that they had the educational background, financial resources, and strength of character to succeed; and, by the year 1940 (20 or more years after they arrived in the United States), they had achieved greater economic success than most other Americans.

Secondary Source Survey

Information in this section is based on family lore and research done by my mother, Nettie A. Riedel van Raaphorst, by me prior to my most current research, and by me currently as background research.

The van Raaphorst Family

The van Raaphorsts were typical urbanites living in the heart of Amsterdam. My grandfather, Christiaan Frederik (“Chris F.”), and grandmother, Elisabeth Johanna Maria Metsch van Raaphorst (who married in 1880), were ambitious and hardworking, but 19th century Holland was not a land of unlimited opportunity. In fact, during most of the century it was a rather uninviting and even forbidding place, as the following descriptions illustrate:

[One thing] that one would notice on a trip back into the nineteenth century would almost certainly be smells, or, more precisely, the stench.¹

In autumn, the wooden parts of the houses, especially in the Jordaan [the van Raaphorsts’ neighborhood] looked as if blackened with pencils, a consequence of the chemical effect of stinking sulphuric vapours on the white lead in the paint.²

The van Raaphorst family experienced a lot of the unpleasantness firsthand: for example, son Willem, who was working in a cigar factory by the age of 15, contracted tuberculosis and

¹ Geert Mak, *Amsterdam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 191.

² Mak, *Amsterdam*, 192.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

died before his 17th birthday. Injuries, some of them quite serious, were a daily hazard in their moving business: for example, at a young age my father fell off the back of the wagon when the horse pulled forward unexpectedly, and he suffered a concussion that caused complete deafness in one ear.

They also felt the sting of class discrimination: my father told of the humiliation he suffered in having to doff his working-class cap to the young daughter of one of his parents' clients before she would accept the package he was delivering.

I will probably never know whether “push” motivators like these outweighed the “pull” motivators in the New World, but I do know that poor working conditions and lack of socioeconomic opportunity in the Netherlands did play a role in the family's decision to migrate.

Family Members

The family group consisted of my grandparents and their seven children, who had a total of eight spouses and 19 children (36 people in all):³

- Daughter Elisabeth Johanna Maria (“Bets,” b. 1881) married Bernardus Johannes Immig (called “Pipey,” because he smoked a pipe) in Amsterdam in 1902, and by 1905 had two daughters, both born in Amsterdam.
- Son Christiaan Gottfried (“Chris G.,” b. 1883) was still single in 1905 when he was the first family member to cross the Atlantic. He married Lulu Jacques, a French Canadian woman, in 1911. One son was born and died within a month in Canada, and the other was born in the United States.

³ Here I have included both their birth name and Americanized name or nickname. In subsequent references I use their Americanized name or nickname only.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

- Son Adam Friedrich (“Fred,” b. 1884) married Johanna Maria Landhuis⁴ in Amsterdam in 1907 and had one daughter by the time he emigrated. His second daughter was born in Canada and his third in the United States.
- Son Antonius Theodorus (“Tony,” b. 1887) married Maria Johanna van Heusden in Amsterdam in 1909; two of his children were born in Amsterdam and the other two in the United States. After Marie died in 1949 he married Elizabeth Catherine Ponger.
- Son Hendricus Marinus (“Harry,” b. 1891) married in Canada in 1911; his Dutch wife Jansje (sometimes called “Jane”) de Groot arrived just two days before the wedding. Three of his children were born in Amsterdam and two were born in the United States. Harry’s oldest son Chris was the only family member to go back to the Netherlands to live.
- Son Wilhelmus Leonardus (“Willem,” b. 1893) died in Amsterdam in 1909 before most of the family had left.
- Son Johan Nicolaas (“John,” b. 1896, my father) had just completed his elementary education before he emigrated. In the United States he married another Dutch immigrant, Johanna Dienst, who died at age 43. His second wife (Nettie (“Nan”) Riedel, my mother) was the daughter of German immigrants. All three of his children (one by his first wife and two by his second, one stillborn) were born in the United States.

Research Results

The following information was gained through my most recent research.

⁴ Johanna’s stepfather’s surname was Bartels, and she sometimes went by that name herself.

Economic Opportunity in the New World

One of the first things I researched was economic opportunity in the metropolitan Detroit area, where the van Raaphorsts settled. One author puts Detroit at the heart of what he calls the Economic Core Region: 1910, as shown in Figure 1.⁵ The automobile industry was just beginning to pick up steam, and Western Ontario, where the first wave of van Raaphorst immigrants stayed for a couple of years, benefited almost as much as Metropolitan Detroit.

Although many auto industry jobs were unskilled or semiskilled, most of the male van Raaphorst family members were machinists, tool and die makers, and die sinkers—all skilled jobs requiring a strong ability in math and science. I wondered how the family members had acquired the knowledge they needed to take advantage of the New World opportunities.

⁵ David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 41-43.

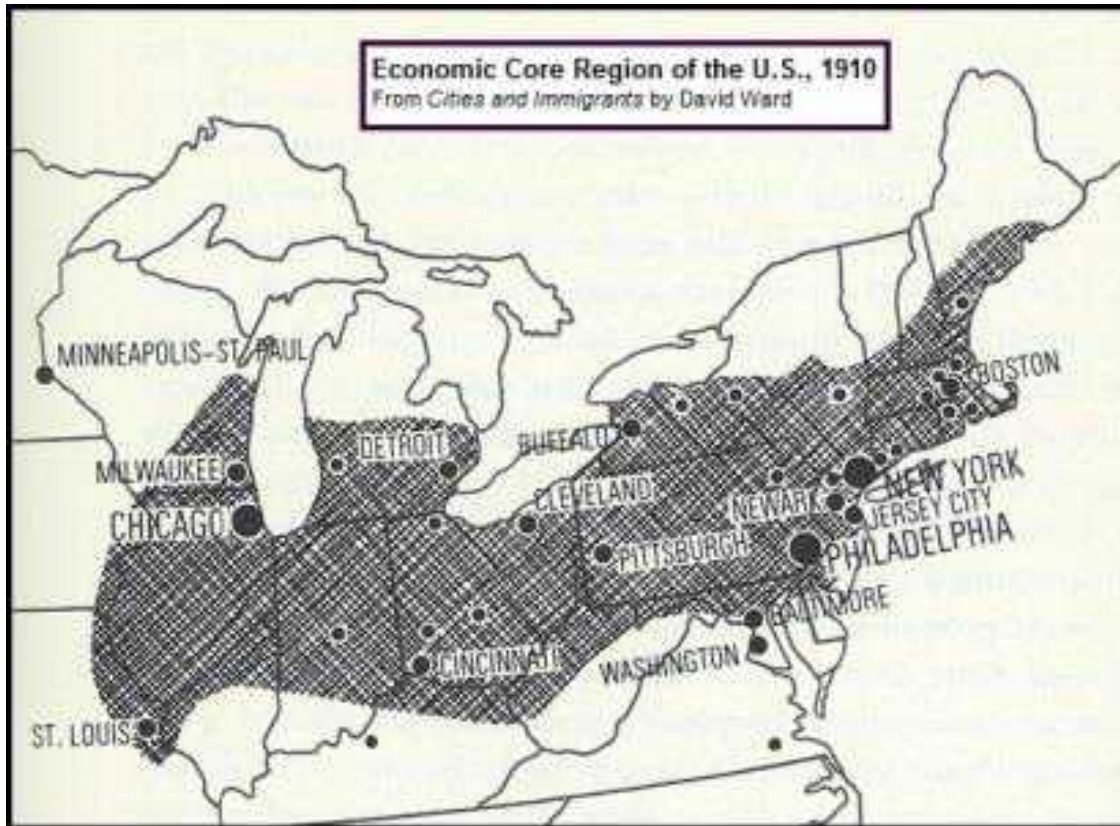


Figure 1: Economic Core Region of the U.S., 1910

Family Education Levels

From family lore I knew that my grandparents had valued learning and had tried to give their children the best education possible; for example, my father attended private school, which was a big expense for a family with little money to spare. I also knew that the older generation (my grandparents' generation) had felt that they were short-changed in the educational level they were able to achieve.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

When I researched education in the Netherlands in the late 19th century, I found that primary education through the 6th grade was not compulsory until 1900,⁶ which was just before my father, who was born in 1896 (and the youngest child in the family), entered school. So what kind of education did the van Raaphorsts get before they left Amsterdam?

Fortunately the 1940 U.S. Federal Census has “highest education level achieved” information, and I was able to find census records for all the van Raaphorst immigrants in my father’s generation. The following table provides an educational summary.

Name	Highest Education Level Achieved
Bets	Elementary school, 8 th grade
Chris G.	High school, 2 nd year
Fred	Elementary school, 7 th grade
Tony	Elementary school, 8 th grade
Harry	Elementary school, 8 th grade
John	Elementary school, 8 th grade (plus additional education after immigration— equivalent to high school, 4 th year)

I believe these statistics show a high level of achievement for people living in the Netherlands in the late 19th century and a strong commitment to education on the part of my grandparents and their children. I was especially pleased that my aunt (Bets) received the same education as her younger brothers!

⁶ R. Luijkx and M. de Heus, “The Educational system of the Netherlands,” *The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-97): An Evaluation of Content and Criterion Validity for 15 European Countries*, (Mannheim: MZES, 2008), 47.

Stages of Immigration

Before I started my current research I had only a vague notion of the timetable outlined below. Most of the information was gained through a thorough study of the following kinds of records:

- Dutch birth and marriage records⁷
- Immigration information in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 U.S. Federal Censuses
- Naturalization records for Eastern Michigan
- Border crossing records (between Canada and the U.S. or vice versa)

The family migrated in four stages, which are outlined below.

Stage 1: Arrival of the Family Scout in Canada (1905)

In 1905 my uncle Chris G. arrived in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. He worked for five years as an interpreter for the Canadian government before anyone else in the family came.

Figure 2 shows Chris G. and his Canadian wife Lu in 1913.



Figure 2: Lulu Jacques van Raaphorst and Chris G. van Raaphorst, 1913

⁷ Especially records available from *WieWasWie: Dutch Genealogy Records*, <http://www.wiewaswie.nl>.

Stage 2: Migration of the First Wave (1910)

The first wave, consisting of my grandparents (Chris F. and Elisabeth) and their sons Harry and John, arrived in Sarnia, Ontario, in June 1910.

I know from family lore and occupation information in U.S. census records that my grandmother (already 56 years old when she migrated) cooked and kept house, and the men in the family immediately went to work; my uncle worked in a railroad roundhouse and my dad started out cleaning spittoons in a hotel.

The picture below (Figure 3), probably taken near at time of their migration to Canada, is my grandparents.



Figure 3: Chris F. van Raaphorst and Elisabeth Metsch van Raaphorst, about 1910

Figure 4 shows the 1910 passenger list for Chris F., Elisabeth, and their two sons Harry and John.⁸ They took a packet ship (Batavier Line) from the European Continent to London, and their arrival city in the New World was Montreal.

⁸ There are errors in the list: for example, the surname is listed as “Raaphorst” instead of “van Raaphorst” and my grandfather was listed as a farmer.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

NAME OF SHIP *Lakeland* DATE OF DEPARTURE *10 June 10* OPERATED BY *Allan Line*

PORT OF ORIGIN *LONDON* OPERATED BY *ALLAN LINE*

NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF **ALIEN** PASSENGERS

4.—REASONABLE DUTY shall be performed by the alien passenger, upon his arrival at the United States, to file his passenger papers through Customs, and in respect of other matters in this regard, the alien will proceed in accordance with the United States Customs Regulations.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Nationality	Date of Birth		Occupation	Place of Birth			Remarks
					Year	Month		Country	Province	City	
1	<i>John van Raaphorst</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>1881</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Medical</i>
2	<i>Elisabeth van Raaphorst</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>1884</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Housewife</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Medical</i>
3	<i>Harry van Raaphorst</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>1891</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Medical</i>
4	<i>John van Raaphorst</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Dutch</i>	<i>1892</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Farmer</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Medical</i>

Figure 4: Passenger list from the 1910 Atlantic crossing of Chris F., Elisabeth, Harry, and John van Raaphorst

Stage 3: Cross-border Migration to Detroit (1912)

In 1912 my grandparents left Canada and took up residence in Detroit, Michigan. Having a second “family compound” gave later-arriving family members two possible places to “crash” while they were finding jobs and looking for independent lodging (son Harry continued to rent the house in Sarnia.)

Analysis of the many border crossing records for this family was an important part of my research. About 50 percent of the records I found were U.S. Department of Labor records and specifically listed an occupation or employer or both. Figure 5, showing a record for my uncle Chris G., is an example. These records were particularly valuable research tools. This one also lists his “landing” in New York in 1905, and the fact that he was last in Detroit in 1912.

PRIMARY INSPECTION MEMORANDUM
 U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
 IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Date: July 5 1914

Name: Christian van Raaphorst
 Age: 31 years Married or single: M.

Occupation: Machinist

Able to read? Yes Write? Yes

Nationality: Holland

Race: Dutch

Last permanent residence: Harlem

Name and complete address of nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came
 Mrs Wm Jacques
 Destination: New York

Fluor: No Who paid passage? None

Amount of money shown: 40.00

How in U. S. Has wife? None at home

Date of last departure from U. S.: Oct 1912

Going to join whom?
 Relative: Mother
 Name: Mrs C. J. van Raaphorst
 Address: 813 Confield St
 Detroit

Whether under contract

Condition of health
 Landing: New York
 Date: 1914
 Residence: Kroonland

Figure 5: Border crossing record (1914) for Chris G. van Raaphorst

Stage 4: Final Waves of Atlantic Crossings (1910-1920)

The final waves of Atlantic crossings by other family members took place between late 1910 through 1920 (although no adult males in the family arrived in Michigan later than 1915). Some of these voyages involved not only east-to-west crossings (mostly Rotterdam to New York) but also west-to-east crossings! Figure 6 shows the list for my father's return trip (Rotterdam to New York) in 1914.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

BALCON, ORBIN, AND STEERAGE ALIENS MUST BE COMPLETELY MANIFESTED.

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered to the Collector of Customs at the port of arrival.

S.S. *Amstelredamum* sailing from *Amsterdam* June 27th 1914

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Rank	Profession	Place of Birth	Parents	Place of Birth	Occupation	Destination	Remarks
1	<i>Restorani</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
2	<i>Schmitt</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
3	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
4	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
5	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
6	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
7	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
8	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
9	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
10	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>
11	<i>van Raaphorst</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Passenger</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Anna</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>Amsterdam</i>	<i>By ship</i>

Figure 6: Passenger list (1914) from John van Raaphorst's trip "home" to visit his cousin in Amsterdam

Had some family members gotten cold feet and decided to give it up and go home? Were they acting as representatives of the already migrated family members and being sent back to cheer the rest on? Or had they just gotten the travel bug and decided a visit to extended family members and friends in Holland might be just the thing? Whatever the reason, it was good that they could scrape up the money for the trip, and the fact that they could shows that they were already achieving some degree of economic success in the New World!

I don't remember my father ever talking about his 1914 trip, and I probably will never know the answers to my questions, but passenger list records certainly reveal a large number of crossings in both directions.

The most "reluctant" member of the clan was Harry's wife Jansje, who came to Canada in 1911 to marry him, and then returned to Amsterdam by early 1912, when their first son was born. Harry continued to live and work in Canada and the United States, although he (apparently) made periodic trips back, because two additional children were born in Amsterdam.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

Jansje and the three children finally all came to the United States in 1920, although she and Harry continued to make periodic trips “home.” The last passenger list I found for them was from 1957, and they both died within 10 years of that date. The siren call of Amsterdam must have been very strong.

Figure 7 shows the passenger list from Jansje and the children’s voyage to the United States in 1920.

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Place of Birth	Destination
1	WILHELM VAN RAAPHORST	35	M	HOLLAND	DETROIT
2	JAN WILHELM VAN RAAPHORST	3	M	HOLLAND	DETROIT
3	JANSJE VAN RAAPHORST	35	F	HOLLAND	DETROIT
4	CLARA F. VAN RAAPHORST	12	F	HOLLAND	DETROIT
5	JOHN W. VAN RAAPHORST	10	M	HOLLAND	DETROIT
6	ELIZABETH VAN RAAPHORST	8	F	HOLLAND	DETROIT

Figure 7: Portion of the passenger list (1920) for Harry’s wife and children

Evidence of Close Family Cooperation

Although I believe that it is possible to infer close family cooperation by “reading between the lines” of evidence already presented, I came across a single piece of evidence that makes the cooperative nature of the family migration quite clear. Figure 8 shows the Detroit City Directory “Vanraaphorst” listing for the year 1920. The two streets referenced, Sherwood and Concord, run adjacent one another. This evidence, along with other records, shows that the family typically lived with one another for a while, and then either rented or bought houses of their own, often in the same neighborhood.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

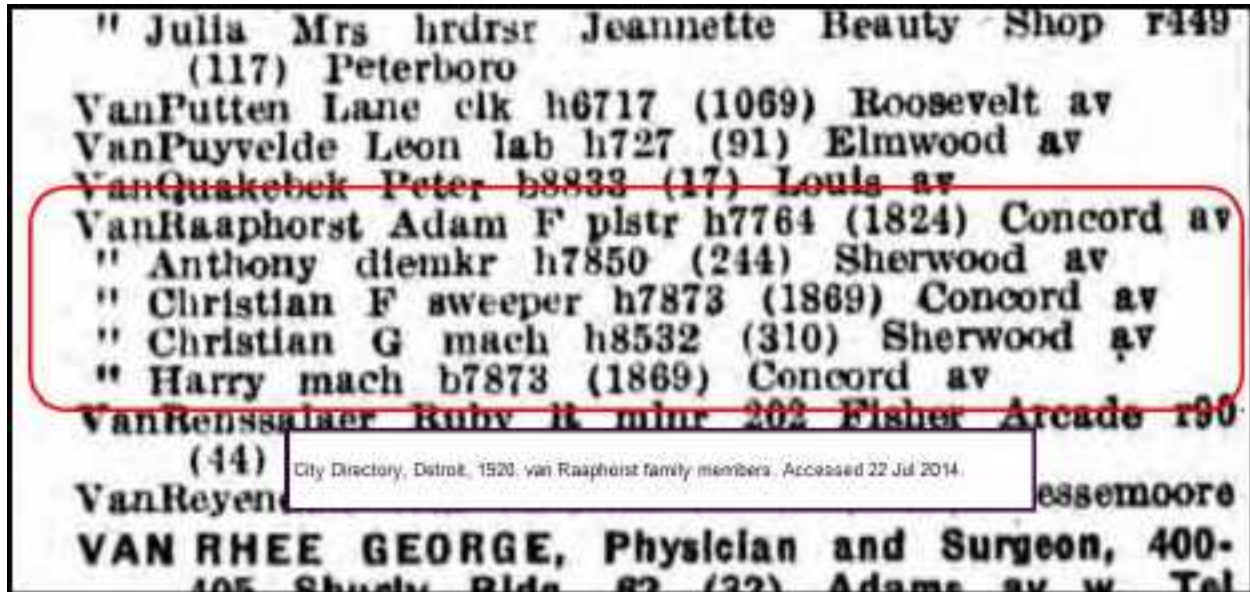


Figure 8: van Raaphorst family residence information in Detroit, 1920

Immigration and Naturalization Summary

The following table lists the years of immigration and naturalization for key family members, as recorded in various U.S. census records, border crossing records, and naturalization records.⁹

⁹ The date ranges indicate inconsistency among records consulted. Key border crossing collections (all available on Ancestry.com) were “Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895-1954,” “Detroit Border Crossings and Passenger and Crew Lists, 1905-1957,” and “Michigan Passenger and Crew Lists, 1903-1965.” I also consulted immigration information in 1920, 1930, and 1940 U.S. census records.

Name	Immigration Date	Naturalization Date
Chris F.	1910-1912	1919
Bets	1914-1916	1926
Chris G.	1905-1914	1933
Fred	1911-1912	1936
Tony	1913	1920-1930
Harry	1910-1914	Bef. 1940
John	1910-1916	1921

Evidence of Economic Success

The following chart provides evidence of the family’s economic success, as documented in the 1940 census. I have purposely omitted my grandparents from the chart, since my grandmother died in 1939, and my grandfather was 88 and no longer working. The other family members had been in the country for at least 20 years, were probably at the peak of their careers, and spoke English fluently. United States Census Bureau statistics show that the average income in 1940 was \$956,¹⁰ so these people did very well indeed by comparison!

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau, “Profile America Facts for Features, Special Edition, 1940 Census Records Release,” <https://www.census.gov>.

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

Name	Age	Residence	Occupation	Annual Income
Bets (widowed)	59	Marysville (owned)	Housekeeper	Other
Chris G.	57	Detroit (owned, \$6000)	Tool and die maker	\$1900
Fred	56	Detroit (rented)	Plasterer	\$1040
Tony	53	Detroit (owned, est. \$5000)	Stationary engineer, auto factory	\$2000
Harry	50	Port Huron (owned, \$5000)	Machinist, power plant	\$2080
John	44	Marysville (owned, \$9000)	Die sinker	\$3300 + Other

Conclusion

I believe that my most recent research on the immigrant van Raaphorsts, combined with known family lore and prior research by my mother, supports my beliefs that the family had both “push” and “pull” motivators to migrate; that they had the educational background, strength of character, and cooperative instincts and skills to succeed; and that they did succeed in their new life in Michigan.

The following image (Figure 9) shows the only known family portrait, and not all the members are included.¹¹ It was probably taken in the autumn of 1913, after the first and part of the second wave of family members had arrived in the New World (it is not clear whether the location is Canada or the United States). The people are obviously wearing their “Sunday best.” Although I am only speculating, I believe it was probably taken to send back to the rest of the

¹¹ Left to right in the photo: Tony, Lu (Chris G.’s wife), Chris G., Harry, Elisabeth (sitting), Chris F., Fred, Fred’s wife Johanna and daughter Christina, and John. Family members not pictured are Bets and family (who were still in Amsterdam), Tony’s wife Marie and their two oldest daughters (also in Amsterdam), Harry’s wife Jansje and their oldest son (also in Amsterdam), and Fred and Johanna’s baby daughter who was born in Canada (and who was perhaps considered too young for a formal portrait?).

family still in the Netherlands to show them the group of family members that had already made the crossing and to encourage the rest to do the same. And, eventually, they all did!



Figure 9: Part of the Chris F. van Raaphorst family (probably 1913) in Canada or the United States

Future Research Objectives

I believe the following would be worthy future research objectives for this family group:

- Additional research on the van Raaphorst spouses and their families, especially spouses whose families also immigrated to the United States
- Additional research on the van Raaphorst and Metsch families¹² in the Netherlands (and Germany, in the case of the Metsch family)
- Additional research on van Raaphorst descendants, especially those that migrated away from Michigan

¹² The Metsches, whose ancestral home was Hessigheim, Germany, were my grandmother's ancestors.

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Key collections:

- *Census records: "1891 Census of Canada," "1911 Census of Canada"*

Untangling the Tangled Tale of My Dutch Immigrant Ancestors

- *Death records: “Canada, GenWeb Cemetery Index” and “Ontario, Canada, Deaths, 1869-1938 and Deaths Overseas, 1939-1947”*
- *Marriage records: “Ontario, Canada, Marriages, 1801-1928”*
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- *Immigration Information: “1920 United States Federal Census,” “1930 United States Federal Census,” and “1940 United States Federal Census”*
- *Naturalization Records: “U.S., Naturalization Records Indexes, 1794-1995”*

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