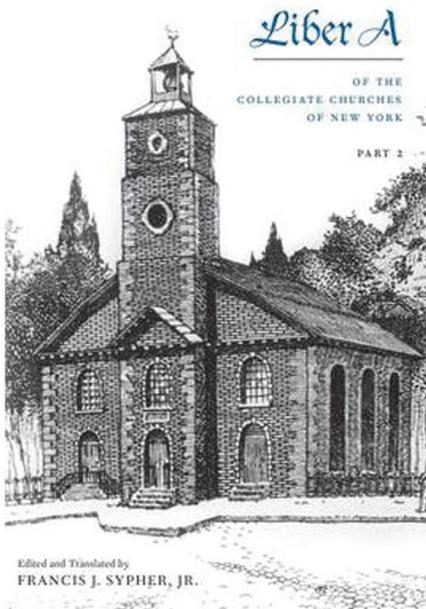


## Note

Francis J. Sypher (ed.). *Liber A of the Collegiate Churches of New York, Part 2. Baptisms 1639 to 1697; Members 1649 to 1701; Marriages 1639 to 1701*, Grand Rapids (M), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009. LVI + 854 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-7341-5.



The year 1628 is commonly regarded as the beginning of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. It was in this year that the Dutch West India Company dispatched the clergyman Jonas Michaelius (1577 - after 1638) to the colony at the mouth of the Hudson River to lead the Church in New Amsterdam. In 1682, the New Amsterdam preacher Henricus Selijns (1636-1701) took upon him the task of ordering the archives of the Dutch church council. These archives contain a multitude of data, among others the records of baptism, lists of Church members and records of marriage intention ('ondertrouwen'). Collecting these records had been one of Selijns's responsibilities in the service of the East India Company. He also copied and compiled earlier entries from records that have since been lost.

More than three hundred years later, the New York historian Francis J. Sypher follows in the footsteps of Selijns. His *Liber A of the Collegiate Churches of New York, Part 2* is a source edition of more than 800 pages of Selijns's compilation of baptism-, member- and marriage records. It covers the period from 1639 to 1701. The book accompanies *Liber A, Part 1*, with official Church documents varying from correspondence, transcriptions of legal documents to lists of names of consistory members.

*Liber A, part 2* is beautifully published with a layout comparable to that of the original seventeenth-century manuscript. The book starts with a detailed introduction in which Sypher explains the early modern customs concerning baptism, Church inaugurations and marriage in New Amsterdam. The explanatory notes in the margins of the registers often offer fascinating glimpses into these practices. For example, the marriage intention

of Theunis Theunissen Denijck and Elsje Jeuriaens on July 27<sup>th</sup> 1689 states: ‘nullis vestibus, nisi solo jndusio’, or, as Sypher adds: ‘with no clothes on except only a shift – the usual woman’s undergarment at that period.’ (p. xxix). Why would the future bride wear nothing except her underwear? Sypher explains that this has everything to do with her widowhood. After the death of her first husband, Elsje Jeuriaens had become responsible for his debts. Being unable to pay, all her possessions – including her clothes – were seized to satisfy creditors. However, law specified that her undergarment could not be taken from her. So by appearing only in her shift, she publicly declared her bankruptcy.

This is not the first edition of the church records. Earlier versions were published between 1874 and 1931, but Sypher’s source edition is the first to contain extensive explanatory notes as well as a glossary. Furthermore, the earlier versions were marred by omissions in the manuscript notes and transcription errors. This was partly the result of an inability to accurately transcribe the seventeenth-century handwriting, but the moral sensibilities of the time probably also played a part. References to children born outside of wedlock or references to suicide were often left out by the earlier editors.

Capturing the most important moments in the lives of the Church members overseas, the thousands of records that Sypher so meticulously rendered and contextualized provide an invaluable source for the social history of New Amsterdam. For instance, as Sypher rightly points out in his introduction, the records contain valuable demographic data about the Church members in the early colonial city. They also provide a much-needed insight into the patterns of migration to New Amsterdam, showing that immigrants arrived from all over Europe. The new city attracted not only individuals from the Dutch Republic, but also from the Southern Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, England and Spain. Interestingly, there are also numerous entries concerning persons of African origin, who settled in New Amsterdam as free Blacks. One such example is Maria Malaet from Angola, who married Harmen Hanszen from Hessen (Germany) on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1650 (p. 483).

Readers of EMLC may be interested to know that the printed records of baptism and of marriage intention also have been made available online via *Wie Was Wie* (<https://www.wiewaswie.nl/>) with advanced search functions. Other digitized and/or searchable New Amsterdam sources are those of the New Netherland Institute (<https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/research/online-publications/>), which include the council minutes of the Director General and Council of New Netherland, correspondence and ordinances. Also the New Amsterdam Stories project (<https://newamsterdamstories.archives.nyc/>), a shared cultural heritage partnership between the New York City Municipal Archives and the Stadsarchief Amsterdam has put a lot of New Amsterdam source material on line, ranging from archival records to archaeological artifacts. A logical next step would be to bring together all these New Amsterdam sources via what has become known as linked open data. This would open up a historical treasure trove, with a key function for the church records with their essential biographical data.