

What's In A (Dutch) Name | A Tulip Time Tradition

For newcomers to the Holland area, some of the Dutch names must be real tongue-twisters—especially those which have two or sometimes three different vowels next to each other.

A few of those are easy to pronounce, if you just remember that an 'ie' is always pronounced as an e, while 'ei' is always pronounced as an i, and the 'oe' sounds like oo as in look. But if you see words with 'eu', 'ui', 'ou', 'ieu', you had better listen closely and then try to imitate what you hear. It may not be easy.

Ever popular are the prefixes 'Van', 'Vanden', 'Van het' or 'Van der'. They are so common, that a Dutchman will often ask: 'What is your Van?' instead of asking 'What is your name?' It simply means 'from' or 'from the.' And that is the reason why a Dutchman, sometimes with tongue in cheek, will claim that the Dutch Bible is more accurate than the English version because it does record Moses' surname. In Exodus 19:14 the Dutch Bible states: 'Toen Mozes van den Berg kwam.' The English version simply says that 'Moses came down from the mount.' From the mount in Dutch is van den berg. The other prefix often used is 'Te', 'Ten' or 'Ter', which means at (the) or near (the). For practical purposes, the prefix is not counted in the Dutch telephone books. If you look for a Van Dyk, you will find it listed under the letter D as Dyk van.

In its early history, The Netherlands was mainly occupied by three Germanic tribes—the Frisians, the Saxons and the Franks. The borders of these tribes are not in line with the borders of the Netherlands. Frisians and Saxons are also found in England and Germany. And although the Dutch accepted one form of Dutch as their official language, that did not change the language as it was spoken among the locals. This is the reason why different names can have the same meaning.

Many Dutch names do not have a prefix, but do have some kind of a suffix. For example, 'stra' in the Frisian dialect means the same as Van der Veen.

Another suffix usually pointing to a farm or place can be 'ing' (usually Frankish), 'ink' (Saxon), or 'inga' or 'enga' (Frisian). The suffixes 'er', 'aar', 'man' or 'boer' often reveals an occupation.

Patronyms are expressed by the suffix 'sen', 'se', 's' or 'sma' (Frisian), all meaning son of.

It is interesting to note that the suffix 'sen' is also used in Germany, Denmark and Norway, while it is 'son' only in English and Swedish.

Although the western and northern part of the province of Groningen speak a Saxon dialect, they do use a Frisian sounding suffix of 'sema' and/or 'enga', of which the difference is the extra 'e' in 'sema' as in Hoeksema.

It was in the year 1811 that a decree went out from the emperor Napoleon, whose armies had occupied the Netherlands, that all Dutch people should register and take on a surname. This name would then remain with their male descendants as the family name.

Many people already had such a name, but others did not. Among them were those who realized Napoleon's reign would soon end (it did in 1812). Thinking that after his downfall things would return to the way they had been before, they decided to take a humorous surname. This turned out not to be a good idea because the new Dutch government thought the idea of surnames was a good one. The result was that the descendants of these people are stuck with names like Oudgehoeg (old enough), Naaktgeboren (born naked), and Komtebedde (come to bed). Some did protest this name-giving with names like Zondervan without a 'van' or Van'tZelfde (which means just the same).



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The first to take surnames were, of course, the nobility. They used the 'Van' (or vander), followed with the name of their property. Thus, they ended up with names like the duke Van Geire or Van Nassau, from the name of a castle and its property.

The city people, as well as the country people, followed their example and often took geographical names, such as names of cities or towns (Van Apeldoorn, Van Haren, Van der hulst or Verhulst); they sometimes omitted the van in names such as Hardenberg, or deleted the suffix and came up with Meppelink.

Others took directional names: Van Noord, Westra, Oosting and Zuidema, in which we can find north, west, east, and south. Still others took one of the four seasons to get Van Lente (spring), Herfst (autumn) or Winters (winter).

Others used buildings: VanderBurgh is a fortress, Van'tSlot a castle, Van Huis means house, or Nienhuis, new house.

People used their province such as Friesema, De Vries, van Groningen, Drenth, Van Gelder, Hollander, De Zeeuw or Brabander.

Names like Van't Zand, Van der Veen, Van Kley, Modderman, Slikkers or van der Slyk all have to do with the soil-condition. The word Veen means peat; Van den Berg, mountain; Vanden Heuvel, hill; van der Weide, meadow; and Van Duyn, dune. Verduin and Van Dyk are, of course, named after the dikes.

De Ward or De Weerd is low land by the dike. It is also used for Innkeeper. Names like Van Tholen, Van Urk, Eilander and Goeree have to do with islands.

The Dutch used to cut peat into sod, dry it and use it as a fuel. In Holland they called it turf; in Zeeland it was schadde; in the Northeast they called it plaggen. So names like Schaddelee and Plaggemars refer to an area where sod could be found. And the word mars points to marshy ground.

Reclaimed land surrounded by a dike so it can be kept dry by pumping is called a polder, and names van de polder and Polderman are related to it. It also was sometimes called 'new land,' and thus the names Nieland or Nyland.

Small hills have different names in different areas and thus we find the names Bult, Belt, Krol and Hoop, although they often are combined with other words to form Bultman or Konynenbelt, which means rabbit's hill.

Significant areas of the Netherlands used to be covered by heather-fields. Different words for heather or heath are heide, hei, heet or hiet, and these words are found in names such as Heidema, Verhey, Heethuis, Lankheet, and Hietbrink.

A somewhat elevated spot in a heather field was called a haar (Van der Haar); another name for higher sandy soil was geest or gaast (de Geest).

As already mentioned, many names have the stem veen (peat) in it, such as Vugteveen, an area of damp peat. If it is very soggy it is known as klunder, a word also known as a family name.

Veld is the Dutch word for field (Langeveld, VanderVelde, Veltkamp, Veldman, etc.). An enclosed piece of land is known as a kamp so we find names like Haverkamp (oats), Blauwkamp (a field of flax) and Molenkamp, which is of course, connected with a mill.

Weide, wei or wey means meadow, and can be found in several names; so the words meyde, made or maat are words for a hayfield, while a waag is a pasture for cattle and the word werf usually means a shipyard.

Woest means deserted or waste land, and in other parts of the country is known as a Bysterveld.

Brink is the village square in a Drenthe community, but it can also mean the edge of. The word 'es' comes from the same area and it refers to the tillable ground around or behind a Saxon village (Essink, Eshuis or Essenburg). However as Es (note the capital E) it is also the name for the ash tree.

The following words are often used in combination with another word to form a Dutch name: kort—short (Kortman-short man, for example); lang-long or tall; boven-above; onder-below or under; laag-low; diep-deep; hoog-high; voor-in front of; achter is behind or in back; klein-little or small; groot-great or large or big.

Colors are also used, alone or in combination with other words: geel-yellow; bruin-brown; oranje-orange; wit-white; and zwart-black or dark; groen-green; blauw-blue.

Other words used in combination are nieuw or nie or nien or ny, all meaning new; and oud, old, oleen or olt for old.

Still one has to be very careful to determine what a certain name means. For instance, the names of some of the great Dutch Masters: Rembrandt van Ryn, first was known as Rembrandt Harnensz (son of Harmen). Ryn is the Dutch for the river Rhine, but Rembrandt was named after his place of birth, the windmill named the Ryn.



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Jan Steen literally means John Stone, but Steen also means a stony or rocky area, or a fortress or a castle.

Frans Hals also was a famous painter. A hals is a neck or a narrow connection between two larger objects, or it is a very slightly retarded or stupid person.

If a country is influenced by water as much as the Netherlands is, it is only natural that the names will reflect this. In many names the following words form a distinctive part. Water-water; zee-sea or meer; Laak or Leek-lake. Small lakes or ponds have different names dependent on their location in the country: poel, spoel, speul, weil, weel, plas, vyver, ven, venne, kolk and put all fall into this category. A put may also mean a well.

Many rivers have provided surnames such as Van der Aa, Van Ee, Vander Waal, Maas, Van der Vecht, etc. Other words connected with water are Baay, Baai or Ham referring to a bay. Hop is a nearly dry or very shallow bay; oever or wal is the bank of a river or creek.

Beek, beck, Kreeke, Krikke, vliet all refer to a small stream. Voort or Vort are similar to the English word Ford, a place where you easily can cross the water (Becksfoort for instance).

The words for marshland are: mars, mers, moer, broek, braak, or siek. Goor also refers to a swamp and a donk is a high spot in a swamp (Verdonk).

The word for a sluice outlet or a lock is a sluis or sluys in Holland, wier or zyl in Groningen and Friesland and a sas in Zeeland. The word for a canal is vaart, gracht, grift; in Friesland it is deel; and in Groningen a diep.

The names van der Lee or van der Ley refer to waterworks like an aqueduct.

OCCUPATIONAL NAMES

Several occupations of the earlier ages do not exist anymore. Interesting for instance is the name De Jager. It did have two meanings- either a hunter, or a man who owned one or more towing horses. This man was hired in the old days to tow a towboat which was once a very popular means of transportation. In those days there were a lot more Jagers who were involved in the towing business than were hunters.

Another occupation, hardly practiced anymore, is that of a kooiker. A kooi is a wooded, very brushy area with a pond in the center. From the pond small ditches would run into the brush, steadily becoming narrower, and at the end they would be covered with netting. With the help of some tame ducks the kooiker, who would often be assisted by a small dog, would try to coax wild ducks into the ditches and trap them. The names Van der kooi and Kooistra or Kooyenga also indicate some association with a kooi.

The Dutch for farmer is boer and that stem is found in many names. A small farmer is Boertje or Boertien in Drenthe. Combinations such as Kleibore, Veenboer, Heyboer, Groeneboer (vegetables), Soepboer (buttermilk), and Nieboer are just some.

A small farmer or a renter of a small farm or the overseer of a farm was called a Meyer. This word stands by itself or is seen in combinations, such as Hofmeyer (foreman of a large farm or estate).

An old word for farmer is Huisman. The agriculturist type of farmer is landbouwer and the stem bouwer can be found in many names also. A bouwer can also be a guildler.

Other names for people who worked the fields are Zaayer (sower), Van der Ploeg (plow), Akkerman or Veldman (both meaning fieldman). People dealing with animals took names like Schepers or Den Herder (both meaning shepherd). Schaaapman is an owner of sheep and Koeman owned cows.

Hengsteboer was involved with raising horses and Hunderman was a poultry-farmer. The following are several occupational names with their translations: Slagter, Vleeshouwer, (butcher); Bakker, Broodman, (baker); Richter, Boerrichter (judge, rural judge); Meester (teacher or master); Boumeester (supervisor); Smid (smith); Smedes (son of a smith); coperslager (coppersmith); Colenbrander (burning coals in the process of melting iron); and Kok (cook).

Also: bussemaker (gunsmith); Messenmaker (makes knives); Karrsenmaker (makes candles); Nagelmaker (makes nails); and Wagenmaker (carriage builder); Rademaker, Ramker, Wielhouwer (wheelmakers); Koetsier, Wagenaar and Voerman (drivers of coaches and carriages); Dekker (roofer); Koetsier, Wagenaar and Voerman (drivers of coaches and carriages); Dekker (roofer); Leidecker (slate roofer); Rietdekker (thatched roofs); Kuiper, Beuker (cooper); Mulder, Moelnaar, Muller (miller).

Others included: Oileslager (a miller milling cole-seed, rape-seed, or linseed to produce oil). De Gruyter or Gorter (garley-miller); Visser, visscher (fisherman); Buisman (fishing boatsman); Zeeman (seaman or sailor); Schipper, Schuitema, Kapteyn (captain or skipper); Praamsma (praam is a flat bottom barge). DeNooyer or De Naayer, Kleermaker, Snyder, Schreur, Schroeder, Schrader (all names for tailor); Weber or Wever (weaver); Verver or Schilder (painter). Verver is also one who dyes textile.



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Neither can we forget Bleeker or Bleyker (bleachers). Wildschut (hunter); Veldheer, Generaal, Kaptein, Korporaal, Sodat or kryger (all military titles); and Hooftman or Homa who was in charge of Schutters (riflemen).

Nobility titles were used as names also, but a Keizer was never an emperor nor was a Koning a king. Other titles were Baron or De Graaf (a count), De Heer (lord), Hertog or Hartog (duke), Prins or Prince and De Ridder (the knight).

The word graaf is also used as an overseer in names as Dykgraaf or Dykmeester or Molengraaf (they watched the dikes and the mills, which pumped out excess water); Bosgraaf (over woods).

Schout, Schouten, Scholten or Schulte in Saxon means bailiff or sheriff. Elenbaas is a noble boss; byker of Iemker (beekeeper); Brouwer (brewer); Bode (messenger); Roeper (towncrier); Koster (church janitor, formerly a teacher); Durkker (printer); Tichelaar is a tilemaker.

Timmer or Timmerman was a carpenter, but this is also represented by the tools of his trade often displayed on a sign to indicate his shop. Also, names like Van der Schaaf (schaaf-plane); Hamersma (hammer) or Bylsma (axe), were representative of tradesmen.

Plants and animals were also used to create surnames. Bossker, Bosman, Vanden Bosch and Woltjer, Woudstra, Vander Voude, Wold, and Ten Wolde all deal with woods. The old Dutch of forest was Voorst or Vorst; Vorst can also mean a king or ruler. Hout is also old Dutch for woods; presently it means wood (Van Houten or Groenehout). A thicket was called a horst; this is also found in many names, including Eikenhorst (oaks), Boekhorst (beech), and Berkenhorst (birch). Earlier the word horst also meant nest, as found in Arendhorst (eagles nest, or Ravenshorst (ravensnest). Boogaard, Boomgaard and Bogerd all mean orchard. The word boom means the tree; Boomker, Hegeboom (tall tree), and Ten Boom.

The names Van Eik, Van Eck, Eekhout, Vereeke and Eikelboom all are derived from the oak tree. Exo are oak trees on a higher elevation. Others are Vander Linde (linden); Pereboom (pear tree); Esseboom (ash tree); Noteboom, Neut, Vander Neut (the walnut); Berk (birch); Beuk or boek (beech); Karseboom (cherry tree); Korstanje (chestnut), and Hagedoorn (hawthorne). A Laar or Laer or Lo or Loo all mean a clearing in the woods, usually natural, and the word rooy in Van Rooy indicates a clearing made by men.

Roosevelt (field of roses), and Vander Tulp (tulip), are named after flowers. Van Tuinen and Van der Tuin mean garden. Others are Rietveld and Rietman (reeds), Boerkool (kale), Raap (turnip), Kornoelju (dogberry). Hekman, Vander Haagen and Berhage refer to hedges, while Van Doorn and Doornbos indicate thorn bushes.

We will mention just a few names that are related to animals. There are too many to name them all. Kietvet-lapwing; Nachtegaal-nightingale; Malefyt-a small seabird; Haan or De Haan-rooster; Kuikern-chicken; Arend-eagle; Valk-falcon; Van der Zalm-salmon; Haring-herring; Snoek-pike; Baars-perch; Leeuw-lion; Vos-fox; De Hommel and Vander Bie-bees.

Some names originate from farms, inns or taverns; Zeldenrust (seldom rest); Nooitgedacht (never expected); De Kroon (crown); Van den Engel (angel); Bontekoe (spotted cow). The word for house or farmhouse can be huis, hof, hoven, heim, honk, hoef or hoeve, and these words can be found along or in combinations. A house or farm with a pyramidal roof is a Stulp of Stelp. A small cottage near a farm can be a Schut, also Schutten, Schot, Kot, Kate and Cate, and names Van de Laarschot, Ten Kate reflect this. The word Schuur or Spyk means a barn.

Some people took Latin or Greek names, often adding a Latin or Greek suffix to the original Germanic name, but also using the real Latin translation. Some of these are as follows; Wigboldus, Mersonidus, Rusticus (farmer), Cupernus (cooper), Nauta (skipper), Greydanus (pasture), Heidanus (heather) and Winsemius (a village).

Remaining are the imports. Many are from the French Huguenots who escaped persecution in France; many kept their French names such as DuMez, Du Bois, Du Pont, De Pree, Du Mond, La Grand, but some did translate their names into Dutch and Le Jeune became De Jonge. From Belgium came names like Van Hasselt, Van Antwerpen, Van Ghent, Waterloo, Wondergem, and Van Bruggen-all towns and cities in Belgium.

From Germany, the Dutch received names of German areas or towns; Van Aken, Benthem, Hamber, Van Holsteyn, Oldenburger and many more. Many other 'Dutch' names have come from other countries, either from refugees (Portuguese Jews, Hungarians or Indonesians, or from other parts of the world). With them, it is just as with Americans after one or two generations they feel to be part of that country, even if their name is not Dutch.

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