



First Considerations - the Van Tonder Family  
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Written for the [Earthworm Express](#), as part of a chapter dealing with the origins of the Van Tonder's in South Africa.

## SUMMARY

Who were the first Van Tonder's to come to South Africa, what was their standing in Denmark and why did they leave the land of their birth? We examine these questions briefly.

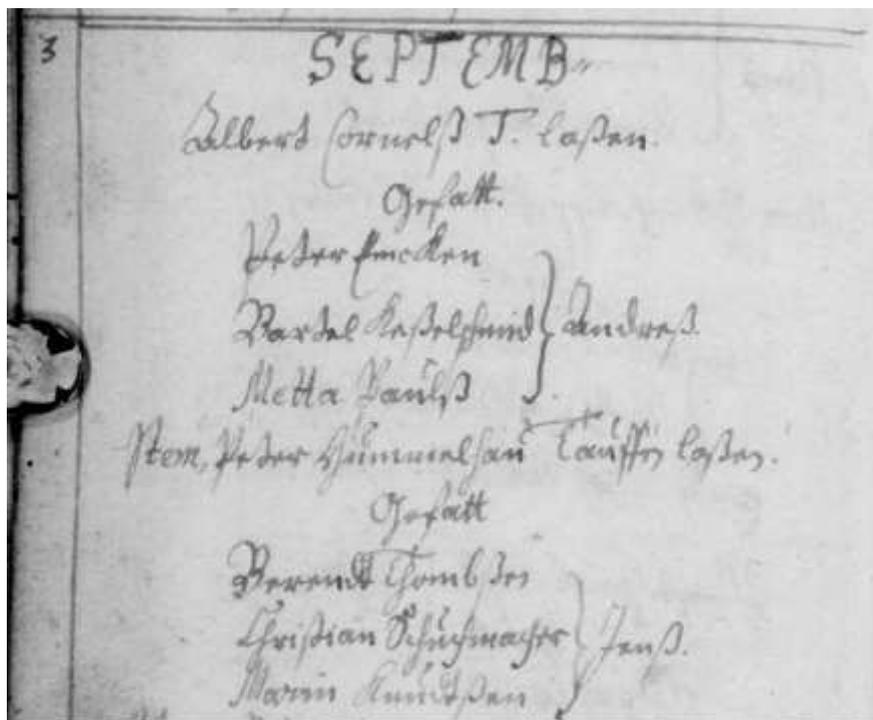
## INTRODUCTION

Three Van Tonder brothers came to South Africa from Denmark. Adolph "Adolf" van Tonder was the oldest of the three brothers, born in 1674 in Tønder. **Andres Cornelsen**, the second oldest of the three was christened in Tønder, Schleswig, Denmark, on 3 September 1676. Johannes van Tonder was born sometime between 1646 and 1706 (we assume the 1706 date without any good reason). Their father was Albert Cornelsen, from Tønder. Some genealogy sites list him as Cornelis Jansz which is not the case according to Andres Cornelsens' christening record.

Of the three brothers who came to South Africa, we know the most about **Andres Cornelsen** and almost nothing further is known about his brothers. The important fact for our journey is that they came from Denmark.

### VERSIONS OF ANDRES CORNELSEN'S NAME

Several versions of his name exist. In the christening records from Tønder on 3 September 1876, the spelling is **Andres Cornelsen** without the Tonderen or Tønder, indicating that neither he nor his father used the surname at this time.

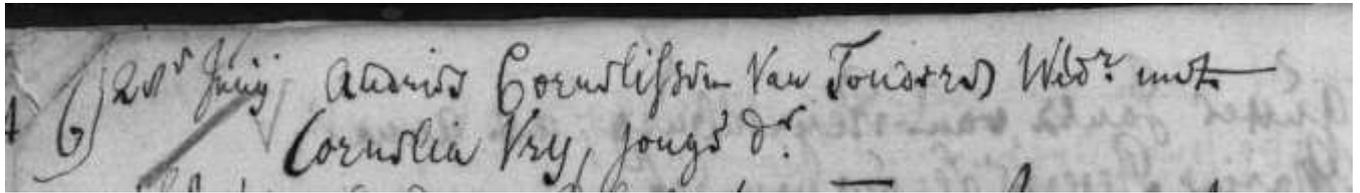


The spelling of Andres Cornelsen from the entry on the day of his christening from 3 September 1876.

The entry on his enlistment into the VOC on 9 May 1699 gives his name as Andries Cornelis uit Tonderen. (<http://vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl/detail.aspx?ID=1602176>)

Two important observations. It seems as if the "uit Tonderen" was added to simply indicate where he came from. His second name is given as Cornelis and not Cornelsen. The "**sen**" meant "**son of**," in other words, "**Cornels' son**". His father's name is given as Albert Cornelsen which meant that his second name was also Cornel, as was his father's.

At the Cape of Good Hope, an entry is made when he marries Cornelis de Vrij where his name is spelled Andries Cornelissen Van Tondern where he retained the "**sen**" version of Cornel or Cornelis and added "Van Tondern" as a surname.



## THE EVOLUTION OF SURNAMES

The fact that he used Van Tonder as a surname was not an uncommon practice. In Denmark, surnames were sometimes taken that referred to occupations (e.g., *Møller* - miller, *Schmidt* - smith, *Fisker* - fisher) and sometimes to places, for example, that of a village or farmstead inhabited by ancestors. Such is the case with Van Tonder. (The University of Copenhagen, Unit for Name Research)

The first naming act, issued in 1526 in Denmark, made heritable names compulsory but was only applicable to nobility. In successive centuries, other higher class people took surnames passed on through heritage. Clergy often *Latinized* their surnames (e.g. *Pontoppidan* made from *Broby*) and artisans often *Germanized* their surnames. (The University of Copenhagen, Unit for Name Research)

In the Duchy of Schleswig, naming acts applying to all citizens were only issued in 1771 and in 1828. The fact that when he was christened in 1676, he did not have a surname, shows that he was not from nobility or one of the "higher classes" of people like clergy or middle-class landowners. He was in all likelihood a peasant or ordinary citizen, looking for a better life at the Cape of Good Hope. (The University of Copenhagen, Unit for Name Research)

## THE USE OF THE TOWN NAMES IN SURNAMES

The fact that **Andres Cornelsen** used "Van Tonder" as a surname at the Cape of Good Hope was in keeping with an already established tradition that was surely known to him.

There is evidence that the surname Tonder was in general use by the early to mid-1600's, especially among landowners from Norway. Peder Christophersen Tønder is one example of such a family. He was born on 8 September 1641 in Kristiansund and died on 1 June 1694 in Dønna. He was a Norwegian district governor and landowner. (Weidling, T. ed.; 2000: 310-311). His grandfather was a citizen of Tønder, Niels Mortensen (1550-1602), who became the patriarch of many with the surname Tønder. (da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tønder (slægt))

Peder Christophersen Tønder's father was Christopher Nielsen Tønder (1587-1656) who came to Norway. His brothers became the archdeacon in Trondheim, magister Ole Christophersen Tonder (1633-1684), the president and mayor of Trondheim, Anders Christophersen Tonder (circa 1615 - 1696). From him descended a long line of military men who were middle-class landowners in Norway.

It seems as if the practice of using Van Tonder or Tonder or some slight variation as a surname was common in Holland in the 1700's amongst men working on board VOC ships. All these, presumably from Tønder in the 1600's and the early 1700's.

- Jurg Tonder from Hamburg started working for the VOC between 1751 - 1753.
- Johan Nicolaas van Tondert from Lubeek worked for the VOC between 1790 - 1791. Jacob Tonder from Langedaalbeen worked for the VOC for a few months in 1749.
- Paulus Tondere from Bergen worked for the VOC between 1729 - 1733.
- Jan Pieterse van Tonderen from Rotterdam worked for the VOC a few months in 1734.
- Pieter Tondert from Dronthem worked for the VOC between 1741 and 1742.
- Jan Andriesz van Tonder from Holsteijn worked for the VOC for a few months in 1723 before he passed away.
- Jacob Tonder from Amsterdam worked for the VOC between 1745 and 1748.
- Pieter Ottho van der Tonder worked for the VOC for a few months in 1717 when he passed away.
- Emanuel Tonder from Bengalen worked for the VOC in 1775 for a few months and deserted.
- Mattijs van Tonderen from Amsterdam worked for the company between 1709 and 1712.
- Hermanus van Tonderen from Groningen worked for the VOC between 1787 to 1799.
- Jurgen Tonder from Dromtom worked for the VOC between 1686 and 1687.

The surname was in some use in the 1600's among Norwegian landowners and peasants who moved to Holland. It became more common in the 1700's but it seems as if the use in relation to **Andres Cornelsen** was initially to simply indicate where he came from and not part of a surname as we know it today. Neither him nor his father used it as a surname before he moved to the Cape of Good Hope.

It is unlikely that there is one central ancestor to all the Van Tonder's or Tonder's in the world based on the early widespread use of the town's name in surnames. In South Africa, at least early in the existence of the Dutch at the Cape, all Van Tonder's presumably come from one of the three brothers who came from Denmark based on the fact that there is no record that I could find of another Van Tonder coming to South Africa on a VOC ship in the 1600's and 1700's. It is of course entirely possible that later on, Van Tonder's came to the country who are not direct descendants from one of the three brothers or from their father on another ship besides one belonging to the VOC.

In light of the number of "Van Tonder's" or "Tonder's" who worked aboard ships for the VOC who all docked in Cape Town, it is a remarkable fact that only three brothers made it to Cape Town by 1699 and stayed, directly from Tønder in Schleswig, Denmark and not one of the "surname-sake's" from Holland or Germany.

## **ANDRES CORNELSEN COMING TO AFRICA**

**Andres Cornelsen** came to the Cape of Good Hope on the VOC ship "Huis te Bijweg." He sailed from Amsterdam on 09 May 1699 and arrived at the Cape on 21 October 1699, employed as a ship's hand (experienced sailor), tasked to man and fire one cannon. We have a further clue to his financial standing from the fact that he made a small loan from the company which was recorded against his name (as a *schuldbrief*) ([vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl))

He worked for the Dutch East Indian Company (VOC) as a farm hand (boerkneg), becoming a free citizen (vryburger) on 31 August 1700 when he left the employment of the VOC. He continued his apprenticeship as a miller in the Stellenbosche district. ([stamouers.com](http://stamouers.com))

## **ANDRES CORNELSEN AS FREE CITIZEN/ VRYBURGER**

People initially came to the Cape, working for the Company (VOC) and some remained at the Cape and became free citizens when their employment with the company ended. At first,

a small number of people were allowed to cancel their employment and remain on at the Cape. Between 1662 and 1666, very few people were granted this privilege, but following 1666 it became more common place. Upon becoming a free citizen, papers of freedom were issued and, in a program to bolster the permanent farming population at the Cape, in many cases, land was allocated to the newly freed burger with strict conditions that you had to remain in the Colony (as opposed to returning to Holland) and rules of inheritance were stipulated and the free citizen (vryburger) had to agree to it. (Geldenhuys, P.; 2015: 23 - 25)

Early on, these farmers were exempt from tax for 12 years and were allowed to trade with the local tribes on condition that they could not offer higher prices than the Company (VOC) was offering. Farm implements were supplied at cost and the Company (VOC) held a mortgage over the property. They could grow crops not already being grown in the Company gardens and the cultivation of cereals was encouraged. They were also allowed to purchase slaves and could not enslave any of the local indigenous people. (Geldenhuys, P.; 2015: 23 - 25)

## **ANDRES CORNELSINS' CHILDREN**

**Andres Cornelsen** was the father of Catharina van Tonder (born in 1707). Almost every Afrikaner today have a forefather that was a slave and the Van Tonder genealogy shows that it was no different for them. Nine years after Andreas Cornelius became a free citizen (vryburger), Jan van Tonder was born as his oldest son on 12 July 1709, born out of wedlock with a slave, born in bondage. A birth certificate exists for him.

An interesting entry is found in the records of the VOC where a certain Jan van Tonder was listed as entering the employment of the VOC, not from Holland or Germany as was custom, but from the Cape of Good Hope. He boarded the VOC ship, Ketel, in Cape Town on 10 March 1737 en route for Ceylon, working for the VOC. ([vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl](http://vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl))

The tantalizing possibility exists that this was none other than the, by then, 28-year-old, first born son of **Andres Cornelsen**, born out of wedlock between AC and a slave. His second son was Christiaan van Tonder, born on 30 November 1710, a child born out of wedlock with a slave; born in bondage. (personal correspondence with Elizabeth Jacobsz)

There are records of other children born to him. Cornelis van Tonder, born 11 September 1712 and died in 1715 and Johannes van Tonder, born 3 September 1713. (personal

correspondence with Elizabeth Jacobsz) Then there was also Cornelus van Tonder born on 24 June 1715, Abigail van Tonder born on 25 April 1717, and 5 others.

What motivated the Van Tonder brothers to come to the Cape of Good Hope? Were they adventurers, trying to make a name for themselves or secure a fortune or did they try and escape some unfavorable situation in Denmark such as poverty or religious persecution? What was the religious conviction in this region and what was the likely faith of the Van Tonder brothers and their cultural leniency?

## **RELIGION IN TØNDER**

Tønder was a protestant community, situated in the Dutchy of Schleswig, in the border region between Germany and Denmark. Schleswig is an ancient Danish region but over the years various parts changes hands between Denmark and Germany. The Reformation was universally adopted by the northern European states and in particular by German-speaking lands. This was no different in the Dutchy of Schleswig and the town Tønder. German replaced Latin in the church services in Schleswig, as opposed to Danish in the nearby diocese of Ribe. Germanization spread to the region mainly through the church. By 1699 when **Andres Cornelsen** was 23, the inhabitants of Tønder would have been Danish citizens with German culture and affinities. (Rasmussen, C. P.. 2010: 172 - 190)

He grew up in a time after the civil war between the Protestants and the Catholics, in a Protestant region. We know from the fact that his children were baptized (christened) in a Dutch Reformed Church at the Cape of Good Hope, that he was Protestant. Religious persecution could therefore not have been a motivation for his move to the new world.

It is fair to say that the three Van Tonder brothers were in all likelihood conservative Calvinist, possibly Lutheran, Protestant, with a strong affinity for the German culture. They must have been at home in the churches in Schleswig and at the Cape the Good Hope.

## **THE ECONOMY IN TØNDER, SCHLESWIG**

If his motivation for coming to South Africa was not religious, could it have been economic?

Schleswig was often grouped with the German duchies of the Danish monarchs, especially Holstein. There were times when the dukes of Holstein owned the entire region such as the first half of the 14th century. The region became part of Prussia in 1864 and only as recent

as 1920 did the northern half of Slesvig, where Tønder is located, vote itself back to Denmark. (Jacobsen, N. K.. 1960: 148)

The region's economy was devastated by wars between Denmark and Sweden which Sweden won. The population, both the nobility and the free peasants, developed a version of manorialism, an economic system of the middle ages, which restored economic prosperity. (Rasmussen, C. P., 2010; 172-190, pp 172-190)

How manorialism worked, broadly speaking, was that large estates and lands, belonging to the king were awarded to people who performed special service. Nobels swore and oath of loyalty to the king and in return received the right to control an estate. The estate strove for economic self-sufficiency. Peasants worked the fields on an estate and were in many cases bound to the estate. They had the right to work their own fields by doing a set amount of days work (normally three to four days of work per week) for the Lord of the manor or the estate. The Lord, in turn, had to provide for those bound to his land in a time of difficulty. (Patterson, G. M.. 2001: 48, 57) The Lord of the manor was the land-owner and the peasant was the tenant.

Some of the manors incorporated villages. Around the manor house or village, there were strips of land. Some of the land or woodlands were common property and some were assigned to specific peasants. Peasants not only worked the land of the Lord but also paid taxes. (Patterson, G. M.. 2001: 48, 57)

The genius of the people from the Duchy of Schleswig, both from peasants and nobility, was that manors were established that were not necessarily under the control of nobility, but under that of rich peasants, thus increasing the number of such estates across the region which in turn stimulating the region's economy and greatly improved the number of tax collectors on behalf of the king.

From the 16th century, the nobles in charge of the manors increased in power, but so did the rights of the peasants. The rent for the land was fixed as early as the 15th century. In the first half of the following century, it became law that tenure of peasants was for life. They could be evicted if they failed to pay their rent, but as long as they did that, their right to their piece of land was for life.

The land of rich peasants in some cases exceeded those of lesser nobles in size during the 1500's. They still did not have the same authority or privileges of the nobles and clergy, nor

were they referred to as manors. From the 1660's common people could possess manors. In 1661 to 1664 the king handed over almost a quarter of all the land of the kingdom to his creditors, most of whom were middle class, as opposed to nobility. The common person was given the right to acquire "noble land." This was a genius invention and transformed the economy of the region. They were given the task of collecting taxes and if they were unable to do so, they had to pay the taxes over themselves. (Sundberg, K., et al.; 2004)

Another industry became central to the economy of this town and was responsible for great wealth namely lace which peaked in the 1600's and 1700's. Testament to the wealth it brought was the fact that town houses from this time dominate the town center. ("Nach der Volksabstimmung" (in German). Deutsches Historisches Museum.)

By the late 1600's when **ANDRES CORNELSEN** was in his teens, the mood in Schleswig would have been very optimistic. The major wars were fought and prosperity restored to the region. The common person had more rights and privileges than ever and everybody, from the king, to the peasant, were better off.

It seems as if there were neither religious nor a compelling economic reason to have left the land of his birth for the new world.

## **THE APREICESHIP OF AC AS A MILLER**

I am unsure if he started his apprenticeship as a miller in Stellenbosch or if he continued an apprenticeship which he possibly started in Schleswig already.

## **CONCLUSION**

The small loan that **Andres Cornelsen** took from the VOC when he started his employment with the company en route to the Cape of Good Hope, along with the fact that when he was christened, he did not use a surname that was transferred through heritage points to a peasant ancestry.

He was protestant and from a rural, farming community where he would have been part of the successful economic system of the Schleswig region. It is interesting that so many people showed up for employment with the VOC from one region during the 1700's. I have no clue as to a possible reason for this yet. **Andres Cornelsen**, further was, as far as I

could determine, one of the first young men directly from Tønder to join the VOC and the fact that he chose to move to the new world is of particular interest. Much work however still remains and this fact will have to be verified with the VOC records in Holland.

One clear conclusion that flows from this is that he was, contrary to his standing in the economic system of the middle ages, no ordinary person. Everything we know about him shows unusual courage and strong leadership. This may account for the reason why we know so much about him and relatively little about his brothers. If it was indeed his son, Jan van Tonder, born from a slave, who boarded the VOC ship, Ketel, in Cape Town on 10 March 1737 en route for Ceylon, it would show that the same spirit of leadership, adventure and courage was transferred to his son. It could show something of an intimate relationship he possibly had with probably all his children, including those born from slave woman. Another fact that showed his leadership was that he took the surname Van Tonder at the Cape of Good Hope.

It is a fascinating quest that I hope to return to often.

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