



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 260

Name: Roelofs, Sara

Dates: (bap 05 April 1627 - wd 29 Jul 1692; cod 7 Aug 1693: d c 1693)

Colonial Society: NY

Date added to ROA: 8-11-2025

Service: Interpreter, trader

Authority: Nelson, William, ed. Patents and Deeds and Other Early Records of New Jersey, 1664–1703. Originally published as Archives of the State of New Jersey, First Series, Volume XXI. Paterson, NJ: 1899. Reprint, Baltimore: Clearfield Company, 2000, p 8. New York State Archives. *Patent*, October 14, 1673. Translated by Eric Ruijsenaars. Featured in *Dutch Interpreter*, Women & the American Story. New-York Historical Society. <https://wams.nyhistory.org/early-encounters/dutch-colonies/translating-for-dutch-and-le-nnilenape>. Zabriskie, George Olin. "Anneke Jans in Fact and Fiction." *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 104 (April 1973): 67, 70.

Biography:

Sara Roeloffs was born in Amsterdam in 1627 to Scandinavian parents who had immigrated to The Netherlands. They were working-class; her father, Roeloff Jansz van Marstrand (aka Maesterland), was a sailor who had probably moved to Holland in search of work. At the time, Amsterdam was a wealthy port city where merchants traded bulk goods like grain, wood, and salt; and luxury items like spices and sugar, as well as products made by artisans who produced consumer products such as clothing

Sara's entire family moved to New Netherland in 1630, when she was just three years old, eventually joined by her grandmother and aunt. They planned to work as farmers for the newly established Rensselaerswijk, a large rural estate, or patroonship, founded by the Dutch diamond merchant and West India Company director, Kiliaen van Rensselaer. The estate was located along the Hudson River, near present-day Albany. Sara's father worked as a tenant farmer, meaning that the family worked for pay, alongside two hired hands, on land owned by the Van Rensselaers. They tended to crops—especially wheat and rye—and livestock such as pigs, sheep, and cows.

Roeloff quickly rose to membership in the patroonship's governing council, and then he moved his family south to work as farmers for the West India Company in Manhattan. That soon led to a grant of 65 acres of land of their own and entry into the higher social class of free farmers. He died not long thereafter, leaving a widow and five children, with Sara, the eldest, just nine or ten years old.



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With more white men than white women in New Netherland, Sara's mother was able to re-marry a short time later. Her fortunate choice was the New Amsterdam minister, Everardus Bogardus, a union that ensured her children's rise in the social ranks. In 1642, at the age of 15, Sara herself married the West India Company surgeon Hans Kierstede. Her sisters and aunt also made advantageous marriages; and her grandmother worked for the Company as a midwife.

The Kierstede family lived by the shore in New Amsterdam, on Pearl Street, where Sara maintained a medicinal garden for her husband's practice and raised their 10 children.

Outside their house just off the market square, Native visitors would trade food and goods with the Dutch and other European residents, and the colony even erected a small house for Indigenous traders. That made Sara one of their closest neighbors when they came to town. In that environment, her natural gift for language blossomed.

In fact, Sara is best known for her work as a translator in negotiations with indigenous groups living in Manhattan and the Hudson Valley, especially the Munsee-speaking peoples, who included the Lenape. She interpreted at wartime talks, served as a conduit for news from Native visitors to the colony's leaders, and developed a particularly close relationship with one of the region's most important Lenape-Munsee leaders, Oratam of Hackensack.

In May 1658, European colonists in the upper Hudson Valley led a series of brutal attacks against a Lenape community known as Esopus that spiraled into vicious wars lasting six years. Starting in July 1663, Sara is specifically named in public records as translator for area sachems (political leaders) in a series of treaty negotiations. She interpreted for Sauwenaare, a sachem of Wiechquaeskeck, and Metsewackos, a sachem of Kichtawangh, during a conference at which the two leaders agreed to stay out of the fighting at Esopus, so long as Europeans stopped selling alcohol to Native peoples.

Sara even translated Oratam's words in July 1663, when he informed Dutch Director-General Petrus Stuyvesant that he had convinced most Lenape-Munsees to remain neutral in the fighting and to resist coming to the aid of the Esopus militarily. Sara also spoke for Oratam when he played a leading role halting hostilities between the Dutch and Esopus first in November 1663, and then at the final negotiations in July 1664.

Ultimately, Sara would be well rewarded for her work: Oratam granted her land in New Jersey and in the 1670s she was granted land by the colonial government.