

# The Prevaes, Prevos and Prevaas families in the Netherlands

Peter Prevos

Published in: Le Prévostal Vol. 12 No. 4 (2002), page 5–8

In this article will give a short overview of the origins and history of the Prevaes, Prevos and Prevaas families in the Netherlands. The complete results of my research have been published in Dutch on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> I have not listed any detailed genealogical information in this article. This information has been published on the FamilySearch website and on compact disk.<sup>2</sup>

## The Valkenburg Roots

The roots of the families are in the southern Dutch town of Valkenburg in the province of Limburg. The origin of the different varieties of the family name is the Dutch word 'prevoost'. In sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch, this word was mainly used to denominate a prison guard or, as is the case with this family, a gatekeeper.

The progenitor of the family, Daniel Prevoo(st) owned from 1550 onwards the house next to the southern city gate, the 'Grendelpoort' in Valkenburg. The house can truly be called the residence of the Prevoo family because remained in the family for more than 300 years.<sup>3</sup>

During my research I have found approximately sixty different spellings of the family name. In this article the original spelling of the names as found in the documents are retained literally.

Before 1600 most people in the Netherlands did not have fixed family names. People were called after their parents, the place they lived, or as is the case with this family, named after their occupation.

Daniel Prevoost is most likely the son or grandson of Daniel der Smeed (Daniel the Smith), the local blacksmith. Daniel was given or chose the name Prevoost because of his duties as gatekeeper. From around 1613 onwards the name Prevoost, or one of its many variants, becomes an inherited family name.

---

<sup>1</sup><http://www.prevos.net/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.FamilySearch.org>

<sup>3</sup>Lei Deckers, 'Valkenburgse huizen en percelen (Houses and land in Valkenburg)', *Geulrand* 33 (1991), p. 33.

Another possible origin of the family is Walloon, the nearby French speaking province of Belgium. Most French family names in Limburg find their origins in Walloon.<sup>4</sup> Evidence of a Prevoost family from that region can be found in the records of the Walloon cemetery in Amsterdam where Marija Prevoost, born in Walloon in 1612, is buried.<sup>5</sup> My research has however not unearthed any links between the family in Valkenburg and any French speaking origins or the Prevoost family in Amsterdam.

Valkenburg was a very tumultuous place at the turn of the sixteenth century. The Netherlands were in an eighty-year war of independence (1568–1648) with the Spanish. While the north of the country had proclaimed union of the provinces and independence from Spanish rule, the south was still known as the Spanish Netherlands.

Many battles have been fought in the area around Valkenburg. In less than one century Valkenburg was conquered seven times in turn by the Dutch and the Spanish. This almost continuous state of war must have had an immense influence on the members of the Prevoost family. Skirmishes between the protestant Dutch and the Catholic Spanish went hand in hand with pillages by deserters and mercenaries without employer. Although several treaties were signed between the warring parties, war did not end in Valkenburg till the end of the seventeenth century. The job of gatekeeper must have been an exciting existence!



Figure 1: The 'Grendelpoort' city gate of Valkenburg on an 1885 postcard.

Not all family members were responsible for the city gates. Most members of the Prevoost family were so called 'block breakers', mining limestone from the

<sup>4</sup>Régis de La Haye, 'Waalse families over de taalgrens (Walloon families crossing the language divide)', *De Maasgouw* 111 (1992), pp. 47–56.

<sup>5</sup>Research by Peter Leising.

local mines in Valkenburg. Evidence of this can still be found in the man made caves where several miners have carved their name in the walls.<sup>6</sup>

Daniel marries Anna de Bande in 1622 and they have two children and ten grandchildren.

## The Gronsveld Branch

Joannes Prevost (1622-1734), grandson of Daniel Prevoo moved in 1690 from Valkenburg to the nearby free manor of Gronsveld. His siblings and cousins remained in Valkenburg and formed the roots of the Prevo(o) family, which has not been part of my research.

Joannes Prevost married local girl Agnes Huijnen and they had eight children. Joannes was probably also working in limestone mines, which can also be found around Gronsveld.

From 1724 onwards, the family name is consistently written in the church records as 'Prevaes'. Because most people were not able to write their own name, the priest would have to guess on how the name is spelled and so he latinises the Prevoost name to Prevaes.

The Prevaes family in Gronsveld was very poor. Between 1753 and 1779 about one quarter of the population of the manor lived under the poverty line and received assistance from the church or other charities.<sup>7</sup> The cause of the poverty was a combination of an almost constant state of war and a series of bad harvests during that period.<sup>8</sup>

That the Prevaes family lived in poverty can be concluded from a letter, which the governor of the manor sent to the bailiff. He wrote that Barbara van den Boorn (1732–1804), wife of Joannes Petrus Prevaes (1735–1790), kept nagging him about the misery they were in and that her children were about to die of cold because she could not afford any fuel for heating. The governor proposed that the bailiff would give her some coal, but not to give her any money because she would probably spend it on less important things!<sup>9</sup>

The Gronsveld branch of the family spans four generations and at the end of the eighteenth century only two male heirs to the family name remain.

Joannes Franciscus Prevaes (1767–1839) moved around 1790 to the province of Brabant where he served as a gunner in the Dutch armies. He married a local girl and started a new branch of the Prevaes family. The Prevaes name remained in Brabant till the twentieth century and in 1947 ten people with the name Prevaes lived outside the province of Limburg.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Funs Patelski, 'De koster van Valkenburg (The sextons of Valkenburg)', *Geulrand* 1 (1983), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Piet Daemen, 'Armenzorg in het Graafschap Gronsveld (Poverty relief in the free manor of Gronsveld)', *Gruetes* 16 (1996), p. 12-22.

<sup>8</sup>Myron P. Gutmann, *War and rural life in the modern low countries* (Assen, 1980).

<sup>9</sup>Daemen (1996).

<sup>10</sup>P.J. Meertens, *Nederlands repertorium van familienamen (Dutch repertory of family names)*

Joannes Prevaes (1774–1838) moved after the French invasion of the Netherlands to the nearby village of Heer. Being the only male heir to the family name left in Limburg, he became the new progenitor of the contemporary families Prevaes, Prevos and Prevaas.

## The French Occupation

The occupation of the Southern Netherlands by the French in 1794 is a pivotal moment in the history of the Netherlands. The occupation was the start of a new era for the population as a whole and also marked the branching of the family into three distinct families.

Most important consequence of the French occupation for family historians is the introduction of official registration of births, deaths and marriages by the authorities. Before 1794 the church conducted the only registration of these events. Church records are however full of mistakes and misspellings of family names. In some cases names of siblings were spelled differently in the same book! The new official registration was more complete and precise. Because of this highly efficient registration family names became more fixed and constant. It also meant that spelling mistakes took on their own life and many new family names came into existence.

In 1799, Joannes Prevaes married Maria Catharina van de Weijer (1767–1809), a local girl from Heer. They had three sons who became the progenitors of the Prevaes and Prevaas families.

Maria Catharina died in 1809 and Joannes remarried that same year with Maria Catharina Habets (1778–1848). Joannes and Maria Catharina had six children, of which the two oldest sons, Jacques and Denis Prevos, form the origins of another branch of the Prevaes family and the Prevos family.

## The Prevaes Family

Three sons of the first marriage of Joannes Prevaes and one son of the second marriage are the progenitors of the Prevaes family.

Henricus Prevaes (1800–1878) marries in 1825 with Maria Ida Hermans and they have six children. The family has much offspring and many descendants of this couple are still living in and around Heer.

Petrus Prevaes (born 1804), migrates around 1844 with his family to French speaking Belgium. He and his family are in the Netherlands on a few occasions, but they settle in Belgium indefinitely. The family has not expanded much in Belgium. In 1997 there were only three entries of the Prevaes family in the Belgian phonebook.<sup>11</sup>

---

*Utrecht*, volume IV (Assen, 1967); volume VII, *Amsterdam* (Assen 1970) and Volume VIII, *Gelderland* (Assen 1971).

<sup>11</sup>[http://geonome.metaphor.be\(1999\)](http://geonome.metaphor.be(1999)).

Jacques Prevos (1810–1878) is the first son of the second marriage of Joannes. All children of Jacques were registered with the name Prevaes. Officials were confused for some time about what family was the correct one. In some documents people are referred to as Prevaes and Prevos. Jacques was also known as Jacobus Prevaes.

During the census of 1947, fifty people with the name Prevaes were registered in Limburg. More than half of them lived in the town of Heer.<sup>12</sup>

## The Prevos Family

This branch of the family was established in 1809. The name came into existence because of a mistake by the French mayor of Heer. He mistakenly used the name Prevos in all documents written by him, as can be seen in the example below.<sup>13</sup>

62 Acte de Mariage de Jean Prevos et  
de Jeanne Marie Chabets

Figure 2: First record of the Prevos name in 1809 from the Dutch marriage records.

Denis Prevos (1819–1887) moved from Heer to the nearby town of Klimmen. At the start of the twentieth century, his grandchildren all moved to the recently opened coal mines in the south eastern part of Limburg. Coal mining played an important part for three generations of this family, including my grandfather and great grandfather.

During the census of 1947, forty-four people with the name Prevos were registered in Limburg.<sup>14</sup>

## The Prevaas Family

The youngest branch on the family came into existence in 1894. Joannes Lambertus Prevaes (1864–1936), grandson of Henricus Prevaes signs his marriage certificate and the birth certificates of his children with 'Prevaas', establishing the youngest branch of the family.

Joannes and his wife Maria Anna Frijns have fourteen children of which ten survive to adulthood. Most the members of this branch of the family still live in or nearby the town of Heer.

<sup>12</sup>P.J. Meertens, *Nederlands repertorium van familienamen (Dutch repertory of family names) Limburg*, volume XIV (Zutphen, 1988).

<sup>13</sup>State Archives Maastricht, *Burgerlijke Stand Heer 1809*.

<sup>14</sup>Meertens (1988).

During the census of 1947, fifteen people with the name Prevaas were registered in Limburg.<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article I have tried to sketch the history of the Dutch families Prevaes, Prevos and Prevaas. My research shows that family names are very fluid, changing their appearance regularly through history. Of the approximately sixty variants of the Prevoost name, only a few have survived till the twenty-first century.

I have been able to trace back three contemporary variants of the name in Limburg to the gatekeeper Daniel Prevoost and his wife Anna de Bande. There is however still a lot of research to be done on the other branches of the Prevoost name and its derivations in the Netherlands!

## References

- Daemen, Piet, 'Armenzorg in het Graafschap Gronsveld (Poverty relief in the free manor of Gronsveld)', *Grueles* 16 (1996), pp. 12–22.
- Deckers, Lei, 'Valkenburgse huizen en percelen (Houses and land in Valkenburg)', *Geulrand* 33 (1991).
- Gutmann, Myron P., *War and rural life in the modern low countries* (Assen, 1980).
- La Haye, Régis de, 'Waalse families over de taalgrens (Walloon families crossing the language divide)', *De Maasgouw* 111 (1992), pp. 47–56.
- Meertens, P.J., *Nederlands repertorium van familienamen (Dutch reportory of family names) Utrecht*, volume IV (Assen, 1967).
- Meertens, P.J., *Nederlands repertorium van familienamen (Dutch reportory of family names) Limburg*, volume XIV (Zutphen, 1988).
- Patelski, Funs, 'De kosters van Valkenburg (The sextons of Valkenburg)', *Geulrand* 1 (1983), p. 31.

---

<sup>15</sup>Meertens (1988).