

Tales of Blawenburg

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Blog 39 The Chalice

By David Cochran



The Blaw Family Chalice

Many families have heirlooms that are passed from generation to generation along with stories to explain their significance. The Blaw family has such an heirloom that has been passed along to ancestors since the 17th century. It is a silver chalice that was believed to be made by Jurian Blanck, Jr., a silversmith and neighbor of Jan Frederickse in Brookland (Brooklyn), NY. Jan Frederickse's name meant Jan (John) son of Frederick. Jan's father was named Frederick Janss. This system of naming people is known as the patronymic naming system in which names are connected with male members of previous generations.

When the British took over New Amsterdam in 1664, many Dutch adopted the naming convention used by the British, which meant adding surnames. Jan Frederickse became John Blauw/Blaw. (It appears with several spellings in old records.) The Blaw meant "blue" in Dutch. Many of his descendants took the Anglicanized version of Blaw's name and use the surname Blue or Blew. In the genealogy of the Blaw/Blue/Blew family, John Blaw Sr. has the number 1, which means that the family considers him the first generation Blaw born in America.

John Blaw Sr. was baptized in the Brooklyn Dutch Reformed Church in 1677. It is believed that the chalice heirloom, also known as a “drink beker”, was crafted in 1676 in honor of Jan Frederickse.

John Sr. is the same John Blaw, who purchased 400 acres along Bedens Brook just a quarter mile south of what would become a village bearing his name—Blawenburg.

The chalice has the initial symbol I*F on the bottom which symbolizes Jan Frederickse’s name.

I*F

Drink Beker or Chalice

The Blaw chalice was not always called a chalice. In the 1980s, a Blue family member declared that the “drink beker” was a chalice. Others have referred to it as a silver cup or a Blue cup.

While it looks copper colored in some pictures, it is nevertheless made of silver. It measures 7 3/8 inches high and has a diameter of 3 1/4 inches at the top and 3 inches at the bottom.

Passing It Along

John Blaw died in 1757, and his will, shown below, says that he was a yeoman, an old term for a farmer who owned his land and farmed it himself. However, he did have help with the farm. Blaw’s will shows that he had slaves (a negroman and woman) as part of his “inventory”.

The “drink beker” is also mentioned in the will, and it became one of the personal property items that was passed along to his oldest son, John, and then other first sons in subsequent generations.

1756, Sept. 1. Blaw, John, Sr., of Somerset Co., yeoman; will of. Children—John (eldest son), Antje, (widow of Abraham Ouke), Janetje, (wife of John Doxey) and Frederick, son-in-law (stepson?) Henry Sartor, who has son John. Personal property, incl. a silver “drink beker,” 6 silver spoons, and silver quart punch bowl. Executors—son John, son-in-law Henry Sartor and John Berrien. Witnesses—James Sutfin, Anthony Denton and Caleb Haviland. Proved Oct. 17, 1757. Lib. 8, p. 480.

1757, Oct. 11. Inventory, £947.10.8., incl. bills, bonds, cash and notes, £775.6.2; a plate tankard and 5 spoons, £14.18; a negroman and woman, £30; made by Arter Sutven and Zebulon Stout.

John Blaw Sr. ’s will. The will was written in 1756, a year before John died.

Chalice Confusion

Like other artifacts that are centuries old, this chalice has had many stories connected with it. Some were true, some were speculative, and others have been disproven. One such story says that the chalice was made in Holland where there were many skilled silversmiths. This was disproven because the silversmith who was alleged to have crafted the chalice was born after the date when the chalice was crafted.

Another nullified theory suggested that the cup was a prize awarded in Scotland to John Blue in a falconry contest. Yet another story says that it has always belonged to a person of the same name. Again, this story was found to be false.

Members of the Blue family wanted to authenticate the cup by having it proven once and for all that Jurian Blanck, Jr. was the silversmith who made it. They sent pictures to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as well as the Yale University of Art in New Haven, Connecticut. In October 1974, the family got the news they were hoping for. Indeed, Jurian Blanck was without a doubt the silversmith who crafted the heirloom.

A Revered Heirloom

Over the years, the cup has taken on the mystique of a sacred artifact. Family members have made pilgrimages to West Virginia to the home of the chalice's caretaker to see and touch the cup. Some have participated in a ceremony where the cup was passed around and people would drink from it. However, children were strictly forbidden from touching or drinking from it. As one Blue family member said, "It didn't have water in it!"

During the Revolutionary War era, many members of the Blaw/Blue family migrated from New Jersey. The chalice created over 260 years ago migrated with a branch of the family who settled in West Virginia. It is now in safekeeping there.



The late Madeline Blue holds the chalice at a Blue Family Reunion in Romney, WV in 2006.

Note: *The Chalice* is also the name of the newsletter for the Blue Family Association, and the picture of the heirloom appears on the cover of each issue.

Blawenburg Facts

These “facts” are more about what we don’t know, but would like to find out.

1. In Blog 35, we reported that John Blaw, Jr. is buried off Servis Road in Skillman. We do not know where his father, John Sr., is buried.
2. We do not know who received the other heirlooms mentioned in the will—six silver spoons, a silver quart punch bowl, a plate tankard, and five spoons. We don’t know if any of these were made by Jurian Blanck, Jr.

Sources

Emails from Ted Blew, John Blaw’s 6th generation and Michael Blew’s 5th generation great grandson

The Chalice, Newsletter of the National Blue Family Association, Volume 28, No. 1, Winter 2010. <https://www.bluefamily.org/the-chalice>

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Photo Credits

Chalice and Madeline Blue photos - National Blue Family Association newsletter - <https://www.bluefamily.org/the-chalice>

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