

THEUNISSEN

Catharina Jacoba THEUNISSEN (1803 – 1831) was my great great grandmother. She was the wife of 4th generation Hendrik Johannes MORTEL (1799 – 1859). They had six children (one died young) before she died at the age of 28. The Morkel family tomb is dated 1831 and was most likely erected for her burial. She is the only ancestor for whom I could not find a signature.

Catharina came from *Vergelegen* (lit: ‘located faraway’), the lovely old farm, nestled below the mountains, originally owned by corrupt governor W.A. Van Der Stel. The farm was divided into four and sold by auction after the governor was deposed. As a wedding gift, her father, M.W. THEUNISSEN had a sideboard made from one of the old camphor laurel trees which had been planted early 1700s by the old governor. (The remaining trees are now national monuments). The workmanship of the sideboard was somewhat amateurish and the piece was known in the family as “*die prul*” (lit. shoddy). The sideboard is still at *Die Bos* and the story was related to me by the owner, cousin Hanna Morkel when he showed me the old furniture in the house.



***Vergelegen* Homestead, now open to the public**

(The house is a 20th century reconstruction)

Photo: André R. Morkel

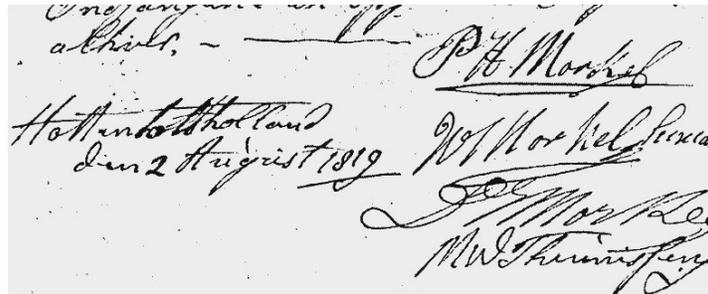
Catharina’s parents were Marthinus Wilhelmus THEUNISSEN (1773 - 1852) and Sara Catharina MALAN (1773 - ?) (see our story of the MALAN family). Sara Catharina had inherited *Vergelegen* from her parents, Jacobus MALAN and Catharina MORTEL, when her father died in 1778. In 1793 she married M.W. THEUNISSEN, then 20 years old and, as was the practice in those days, the farm was registered in his name. They had 15 children.

M.W. THEUNISSEN was a member of the Stellenbosch Commando sent to the eastern border in 1799 to quell a disturbance there. (3, p37). He was an elder of the Stellenbosch church and a Heemraad.

As commandant he fought with conspicuous bravery under General Janssens at the battle of Blaauwberg against the second British occupation in 1806, and was honoured as *die Held van Blaauwberg* (the Hero of Blueberg). Together with the three Morkel brothers (Philip Hendrik, Willem and Daniel Johannes), M.W. formed the *voorstanders* (lead persons) in establishing the town and church of Somerset West (see our story 'We Need a Town and a Church').

M.W. was described by a Cape Town merchant George Thompson as 'substantial African landowner'. He lived in some style at *Vergelegen* and was at heart an entrepreneur – builder of Dutch churches at Caledon and Stellenbosch, and the owner of several *Overberg* farms. (5, p51).

As an old man he joined one of his sons at Riversdale where he died in 1852, aged 79. He had passed on the farm *Vergelegen* some time previously to his son, Jacobus Marthinus. (3, p37; 5, p51)



Signatures of M.W. Theunissen and the three Morkel brothers, Philip Hendrik, Willem and Daniel Johannes. Debit note for the organ of the Somerset West Church. Source: Hopkins, 5, p. 47

Marthinus Wilhelmus was a son of the *stamouer* Marthinus Aegidus THEUNISSEN (1744 – 1828) (2). M.A. was born in Holland, son of Marthinus THEUNISSEN and Anne Maria SLIJPER. He arrived at the Cape in 1764 (or perhaps 1765) from Maastricht as a soldier employed by the VOC. About 3 years after his arrival he married Anna Maria LOURENS. They had 12 children with M.W. being their 5th child. Another son, their 7th, Wilhelmus Hendricus also married a Malan girl, Emmerentia Elisabeth, sister of M.W.'s wife, Sara Catharina Malan.

Stamouer Marthinus Aegidus THEUNISSEN managed the VOC *buiteposte* (outposts) at *Riviersonderend* (lit: river without end) and *Buffeljachtsrivier* (lit: hunting buffaloes river). These were agricultural stations in the *Overberg* (lit: over the mountain) on the far side of the Hottentots Holland mountains in the direction of Swellendam. The postholders supervised logging of timber for the colony, the protection of forests and trading of cattle with the indigenous tribes. M.A. fulfilled his tasks with such diligence that governor Tulbagh appointed him to the post at *Zoete Melks Valleij* (lit. Sweet Milk Valley). He was an intelligent and cultured man whose 35 years tenure as *baas* of *Zoete Melks Valleij* made him a respected leader of the *Overberg* community. He served several governors at the Cape with a loyalty and honesty that was transparent. 'Opulent, well-bred and hospitable', Swedish explorer Anders Sparrman wrote of the Theunissens as a young couple at *Riet Valleij*, and this view was shared by his countryman Thunberg as well as the Scottish botanist Paterson. Even when over seventy years and in retirement, M.A. Theunissen retained an active and inquiring mind, always curious to hear news from Europe and Table Bay from passing visitors. (5, p50)

M.A. Theunissen stayed loyal to the Company during the Swellendam insurrection and the change to the British occupation was troubling for this dedicated civil servant. In 1813 he retired to present day Caledon where he died at the age of 84 on 23 May 1828. (2)

André T. Morkel
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Die Prul. Sideboard made from a Camphor Laurel tree from *Vergelegen* as wedding present for Catharina Jacoba Theunissen on her marriage to Hendrik Johannes Morkel. Photo: Author



Camphor Laurel trees at *Vergelegen*. Planted by governor W.A. van der Stel early 1700s. Photo: André R. Morkel



Vergelegen Pastures. Hottentots Holland Mountains

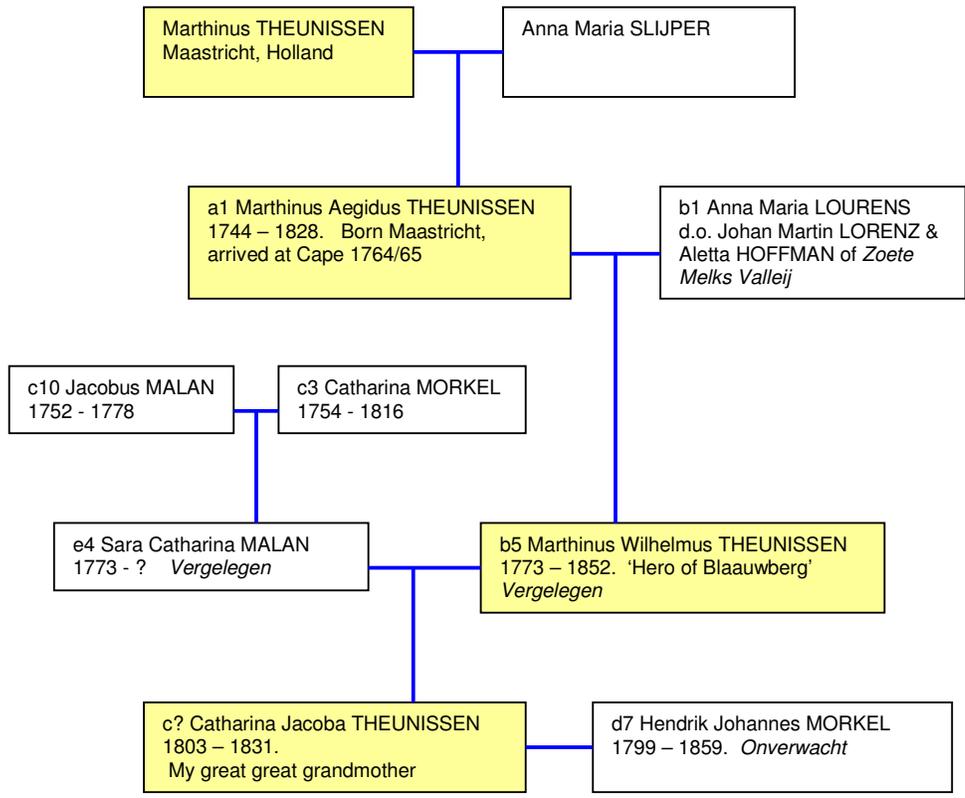
Photo: André R. Morkel



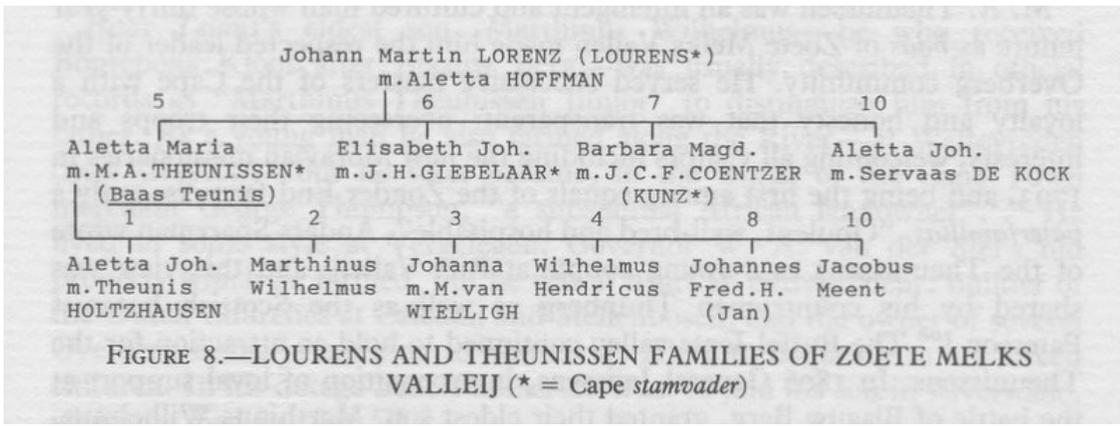
Morkel tomb at *Die Bos* built 1831, the year Catharina née Theunissen died. Source: (1)

Sources

1. P.W. Morkel 1961, *The Morkels: Family History and Family Tree*. Published privately
2. Theunissen in www.stamouers.com.au
3. Peggy Heap, 1970. *The Story of Hottentots Holland*. A.A. Balkema Cape Town
4. H.C. Hopkins, 1969. *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Gemeente. Somerset Wes. 1819 – 1969*.
5. Edmund H. Burrows, 1994. *Overberg Odyssey. People, Roads & Early Days*. Privately printed in co-operation with the SWELLENDAM TRUST.



Family Lines for Catharina Jacoba THEUNISSEN
Compiled from sources 1,2,3 & 5



Source: Burrows, (5, p 49)

Appendix

Theunissen *Stamouer* from www.sastamouers.com

Marthinus Aegidus THEUNISSEN (in G.R. genoem Jan Marthinus), is in 1744 gebore, seun van Marthinus THEUNISSEN en Anna Maria SLIJPER. Hy het in 1764 of 1765 uit Maastricht (Nederland) in die Kaap aangekom as soldaat in diens van die H.O.I.K. Omtrent drie jaar na sy aankoms het hy in die huwelik getree met **Anna Maria LOURENS**.

KINDERS

- (1) Anna Alida Geertruij (1782),
- (2) Johannes Hubertus (1785) en
- (3) George Nicolaas (1790) ongetroud oorlede is. Die ander was:
- (4) Aletta Johanna (1769), getroud met Theunis HOLTSHAUSEN.
- (5) Marthinus Wilhelmus (1773), getroud 19.5.1793 met Sara Catharina MALAN; 15 kinders.
- (6) Johanna Magdalena (1774), getroud met Mattijs VON WIELLIGH.
- (7) Wilhelmus Hendricus (1777), getroud 5.11.1797 met Emerentia Elisabeth MALAN; 8 kinders.
- (8) Eijda Christina Gesina (1783), getroud met Johannes Albertus LAUBSER.
- (9) Johannes Frederik Hubertus (1787), getroud 1.3.1807 met Emerentia WENTZEL; 6 kinders.
- (10) Jacobus (1791), getroud met Willielmina Susanna WIUM; 7 kinders.
- (11) Sara Hendrina Qeloffina (1792), getroud met Pieter Gerhard WIUM.
- (12) Nicolaas, getroud met Johanna HAMMAN; 5 kinders.

Die stamvader, Marthinus, is as poshouer na buiteposte van die H.O.I.K. aan die Riviersonderend en Buffeljagtsrivier gestuur. Die pligte van die poshouers was baie verantwoordelik en veelvuldig. Hulle moes toesig hou oor die bergwoude wat die H.O.I.K. in Kaapstad van timmerhout voorsien het, die vernietiging van die bosse verhinder, asook die omkap van bome reël. Hulle het beeste van die inboorlinge geruil om die Kompanjie van vleis te voorsien. Die poshouers was in sekere opsigte beter daaraan toe as baie vryburgers wat betref huise, meubels en vee.

Theunissen het sy pligte met soveel toegewydheid uitgevoer dat goewerneur Tulbagh hom aangestel het op die pos op „Zoet Melks Vlei”. Baie beroemde persone soos o.a. Lichtenstein, Thunberg, lady Anne Barnard, Latrobe, ens., het hom op „Soetmelksvlei” of op „Rietvlei” besoek, en almal van hulle het getuig van sy bekwaamheid en gasvryheid.

Tydens die Swellendamse opstand het Theunissen getrou gebly aan die H.O.I.K., maar die oorgawe van die Kaap het sekere veranderinge van beleid meegebring wat hom in baie opsigte innig getref het. In 1813 het hy een van die oorspronklike erwe in Swartberg (tans Caledon) gekoop. Volgens die opgaafrol vir Caledon van 1821, het Theunissen en sy eggenote op „Het Zieken Huis over de Rivier Zonder End” vier uur van die setel van die magistraat gewoon. Theunissen is na ’n romantiese loopbaan en ’n ampsbekleding onder vier regerings op 23 Mei 1828 in die ouderdom van 84 jaar oorlede.

Bronne:

“Die AFRIKANER FAMILIENAAMBOEK & PERSONALIA” (1955) saamgestel deur J.H Redelinghuys

Bydrae:

Pieter Conradie pietc@iafrica.com