

Van Osterns

The Kokernot and Van Ostern families' flourishing friendship in New Orleans almost certainly began a generation earlier in Amsterdam, where Salomon van Oesteren lived on the fringe of the Jewish Quarter on the elegant St. Anthoniebreestraat.¹ His parents' tombstones at the upscale Muiderberg Cemetery signaled the family's affluence—less well-off Jews used Zeeburg Cemetery.² His children married well, too. Salomon's second son, Levi Salomon, pledged 3,000 florins to guarantee his 1808 marriage to Mietje, who brought a dowry of 2,000 florins, both exceptionally large sums among Ashkenazic Jews.³

Levi and Mietje did not thrive financially. Instead, like all the Netherlands they were beaten down by the dissipation of the Dutch Golden Age. Within four years they were living in the poor part of the Jewish Quarter, Marken, where David Kokernot's mother's family had lived after their immigration from Hamburg. During the late 1810s Europe saw massive crop failures, stagnated trade and manufacturing, riots, and the Panic of 1819, resulting in swarming emigration to North America. These circumstances are doubtless what drove the family to New Orleans with their three children, Nena, Sara, and Barend, at about the same time as the Kokernots, around 1820.⁴

When Levi and Mietje immigrated to New Orleans they must have

1 Salomon van Oesteren's surname registration gives the names, ages, and addresses of his and his children's families: Harmen Snel and Dave Verdooner, *Naamsaannemingsregister Amsterdam 1811–1826* [Name adoption register Amsterdam 1811–1826], Jerusalem: Nederlandse Kring voor Joodse Genealogie, n.d., 144–145. The image of the original is at: Amsterdam (Noord-Holland). Burgerlijke Stand, "Naamsaannemingen van Joden, 1811-1837," page 75A verso, Family History Library film number 115,042. There Salomon's signature is clearly spelled "Oesteren" though his family later in New Orleans most often used "Ostern."

2 Documentation of the burials of Salomon's parents are at: "Ashkenazi Amsterdam in the Eighteenth Century—Version Aug 2009," database, *Akevoth* (Israel), www.dutchjewry.org : 2009, entry for Oostrum-Levie, Mozes Isaac Itsak, citing his Muiderburg burial 16 Aug 1802, and his wife's on 4 Sivan 5545 (13 May 1785).

3 Salomon's marriage and his bride's dowry are also at: "Ashkenazi Amsterdam in the Eighteenth Century," *Akevoth*, entry for Mulheim Millem, Barend Baruch Mozes, citing *tnaim acharonim* [literally, "last conditions" a Jewish marriage agreement], on 2nd day of Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5568 (27 June 1808).

4 The exact date of the Van Osterns immigration to New Orleans is unknown, but a note on the index card for Maria van Ostern's burial, created by the WPA, allows an approximation. After giving her death date as 3 March 1830 it says "Resided for the last ten years in this city." "WPA Cemeteries (Hebrew) Index, ca. 1841-ca. 1931" (card file, n.d., Louisiana Historical Center, The Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans), entry for "Maria Millum, wife of Levi van Ostern."

wanted to fit in. Their new city had no Jewish Quarter--in fact, New Orleans held few Jews--and their customers spoke English and French. Like many immigrants, they Americanized their names. Oesteren became Ostern; Mietje became Maria; Nena became Nancy; Sara became Amelia; Barend became Benjamin. Though the Van Osterns remained devoutly Jewish in religion, Nancy Americanized her children's names even more thoroughly, naming her sons James Monroe, Alexander Benjamin, George Washington, and Henry Clay.