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# The Pastor and the Painter, two Members of the Camminga Family of Early Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

It may be useful to begin by pointing out that the area called Acadia, or *l'Acadie*, by the French from 1604 onwards was known as Nova Scotia to the English after they first laid claim to it in 1621. At the time the area comprised modern-day Nova Scotia, minus Cape Breton Island, as well as New Brunswick and the eastern part of Maine as far as the Penobscot River.

The French claimed and settled Acadia in the first decade of the seventeenth century. The area fell into English hands on four different occasions in the next few decades, but each time it was recovered by France, usually at the negotiating table. Early in the eighteenth century war broke out between France and England once again, the primary *casus belli* being the succession to the Spanish throne. In this war the Dutch Republic fought on the side of the English. The New England colonies, especially Massachusetts, had always regarded French possession of Acadia as a threat to their security, and they had been the driving force behind most of the earlier conquests of Acadia from the French. Renewed war between France and England was regarded by the New Englanders as an opportunity for another, and hopefully final and permanent, conquest of the French colony. An assault on Acadia by the New Englanders in 1704 failed, as did two more in 1707. However, a fourth attempt in 1710 was successful, and that was the end of Acadia as a French possession. British ownership of Acadia, minus Isle Royale (Cape Breton), was formally recognized by France in the Treaty of Utrecht which brought the War of the Spanish Succession, known in North America as Queen Anne's War, to a conclusion.

The negotiations were conducted, and the peace treaty signed, in the city hall of Utrecht. The historian W.S. MacNutt has pointed out that in these peace negotiations Acadia perhaps enjoyed a greater diplomatic prominence than at any other time in history. The question of Isle Royale, or Cape Breton, in particular almost wrecked the talks. Initially the British recognized French possession of Isle Royale without too much ado, but when this was objected to by the London merchants the British reopened the matter, causing the near-collapse of the negotiations. However, in the end the French negotiators won the debate and France was confirmed in its possession of the island. And before long France was to build Louisbourg on Isle Royale, the largest fortress ever built in North America, to protect the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and thereby the sea route to New France.

Following the signing of the treaty, the British government did little to attract English settlers to Nova Scotia and its population remained largely French, a situation which seemed to have been of greater concern to the New Englanders than to the authorities in London. Consequently, when the War of the Austrian Succession broke out in Europe in 1740, the New Englanders saw this as a golden opportunity to remove the threat posed by Louisbourg. For the fortress not only was a threat to New England in itself, but also served to keep alive and bolster the loyalties of the Nova Scotia French to France, or so at least the New Englanders thought. So in 1745 the New Englanders undertook an expedition against Louisbourg and took the fortress. However, three years later it was returned to France by the Treaty

of Aix-la-Chapelle - to the chagrin of the New Englanders, needless to say.

Even so, the British authorities realized by now that if Nova Scotia were to remain British, they would have to increase the British presence in the colony. It was for that reason that Halifax was founded in 1749 to serve as a counterbalance to Louisbourg, and the Governor, Edward Cornwallis, also took steps to attract English settlers to Nova Scotia. However, disappointed with the type and quality of English settlers sent out to him, Cornwallis begged the authorities in London to send him so-called "foreign Protestants." This was not a novel idea, because for some decades already Britain had been recruiting such people, especially in Switzerland, Germany and the Dutch Republic, for settlement in her North American colonies.

Cornwallis' request received a favourable response, and before the end of 1752 some nine hundred "foreign Protestants" arrived in Nova Scotia, for a total of about 2,450 individuals. Virtually all of them arrived on vessels chartered by the British government, most of which - ten of the twelve - sailed for Nova Scotia from Rotterdam, the other two from London. Of the approximately nine hundred families, about six hundred came from Germany, one hundred and thirty-five from Montbéliard in eastern France, one hundred and twenty from Switzerland and, according to Winthrop Bell, twenty-two from the Dutch Republic (although information given by Esther Clark Wright in *Planters and pioneers* suggests that the number of Dutch families was no more than fifteen). Of the Dutch migrants, at least two thirds would appear to have come from the northern provinces of Groningen and Friesland. Of the fifteen families recorded by Esther Clark Wright, five were farmers while the others pursued a fairly wide range of occupations. The British government recruiting agent John Dick, a British merchant living in Rotterdam, testified that in many parts of Holland families and individuals were prepared to come to Nova Scotia provided they were given free passage in addition to what was promised to all newcomers upon arrival in the colony, namely free land, the supplies needed to begin farming, and a year's subsistence.

In view of the fairly extensive efforts at recruiting that Dick reports carrying out in Holland, and also in view of the fact that most vessels sailed from Rotterdam, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that more Dutch families could not be found amongst the "foreign Protestants." The question of free passage was most likely not a real stumbling block, for it was possible to earn one's own passage as well as that of one's family by working on the Halifax fortifications and public buildings after arrival in the New World. The underlying reasons why Dick managed to recruit so many migrants in some of the German principalities, and only a few in the Dutch Republic, were no doubt of a religious and economic nature. Many of the German immigrants seem to have been fleeing religious oppression, fundamental economic problems, or the devastations of war, conditions which the Dutch Republic at the time was fairly free of. Consequently Dick's recruiting campaign would not have received much of a response there.

Of the German families who arrived in Halifax in the early 1750's, most settled by 1755 in Lunenburg, south of Halifax, as did those from Montbéliard. The Swiss and the Dutch, however, appear to have mostly remained in Halifax or moved elsewhere, perhaps to other British colonies in North America. In fact, Bell believes that most of them left the colony after some time and that of all the "foreign Protestants," the Dutch proved to be the least permanent settlers. Of the few Dutch natives who settled in Lunenburg, two deserve our attention. The first of these was a man named van der Heide. He is mentioned by Colonel Charles Lawrence in a letter to the colonial governor dated July 2, 1753. Lawrence praises van der Heide - whose name he spells Vanderhyde - as a man possessing leadership abilities and well educated, and suggests appointing him as schoolmaster for Lunenburg. However, this does not appear to have happened, and van der Heide is not heard of again, which suggests that he did not stay in Lunenburg long. In fact, in an aside, Lawrence asks why a man with van der Heide's

abilities and education would have emigrated in the first place. Was he on the run from problems at home, or was he simply an adventurer?

Another Dutchman to settle in Lunenburg merits greater attention. He was Bruin Romkes Camminga, whose last name was corrupted to Comingo after his arrival in Nova Scotia. Most Dutch readers would be hard pressed to recognize this thoroughly Dutch, or rather Frisian, name in such a guise. Camminga was born in Leeuwarden in 1723, lived in the province of Groningen for some time, and arrived in Halifax aboard the *Speedwell* in1751 with his wife and one or more children. At the time he was a woolcomber, and it has been suggested that Camminga was not his real name, but that he adopted it on account of his occupation. His wife died not long after their arrival in Nova Scotia, and in September 1753 Camminga married Renée des Camps. The ceremony took pace in Lunenburg, where the bulk of the "foreign Protestants" had been resettled in June that same year. Here he received a land grant and also took up fishing. Following the founding of Chester, on the coast between Lunenburg and Halifax, the family moved there some time in the 1760's, where he continued fishing, but also prepared himself for the ministry under the tutelage of Rev. Seccombe, the Congregationalist minister in Chester.

In July 1770 Camminga was ordained minister of the German Reformed Protestants - the *Hochdeutsch Reformirten Gemeinde zu Lunenburg*, erroneously referred to in some works as Dutch (if it had been a Dutch Reformed Church , it would presumably have been called the *Niederdeutsch Reformirten Gemeinde).* There were some sixty Reformed Protestant families in Lunenburg, and it would appear that following the founding of the town in 1753 they created their own congregation. It was certainly an informal one, for not until 1759 were Protestant dissenters in Nova Scotia, including the Reformed Protestants, formally granted full freedom of worship; until then, all Protestant dissenters were, in theory at least, expected to attend the Church of England services. After they received the right to worship, the Reformed Protestants in Lunenburg had restricted use of St. John's Anglican church, but that situation was found to be unsatisfactory. Consequently, in 1769 they erected their own church building on the site now occupied by St.Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Although they now had their own church facilities, they still did not have their own ordained pastor, and in fact they had never had one since their arrival in 1753. During all those years the congregation was served almost exclusively by laymen, one of the first being Michael Ley, a blacksmith from Switzerland. Atempts were made in both Pennsylvania and Germany to recruit a Reformed pastor, but these efforts bore no fruit. It was then that the congregation turned to Camminga, whom they obviously knew because he had lived among them for some years and had no doubt worshipped with them as well. Although not German himself, he obviously had a sufficient command of the language for the congregation to believe that he could serve as their pastor. Whether he prepared for the ministry, with the help of Seccombe, in response to their call, or whether he had already done so before they approached him, is not clear.

Camminga's ordination took place at the hands of an ad hoc Presbytery, the first assembly of its kind in Canada, and Camminga was the very first Reformed clergyman to be ordained in Canada. The Presbytery consisted of four clergymen: two Presbyterians and two Congregationalists. The former were James Murdoch from Horton Township in the Annapolis Valley and James Lyon from Onslow near Truro, while the latter were John Seccombe from Chester and Benajah Phelps from Cornwallis Township, also in the Annapolis Valley. Although Camminga was not formally trained as a pastor, the Prebytery justified its ordination of him on the basis of his character and his innate abilities, in addition to which it called on precedent by pointing to a similar ordination in Scotland earlier that century. One of the questions put to Camminga by the Presbytery was: "do you own and will you adhere to the profession of faith you have made to us, the Heidelburgh [i.e. Heidelberg] and Assembly's Catechism and the doctrines contained therein as

being founded on and consonant unto the Holy Scriptures?" The catechisms referred to were those of the German Reformed Protestants and the (Scottish) Presbyterians respectively. The ordination was attended by the colonial governor Lord William Campbell, and took place in St. Mathew's Congregational church in Halifax. The ordination sermon was preached by Rev. Seccombe, Camminga's tutor, and it was published by A. Henry, a Halifax publisher. Thus Camminga became the first pastor of the *Hochdeutsch Reformirten Gemeinde zu Lunenburg*.

Five years after his ordination, the American Revolution broke out, and in 1783 large numbers of Loyalists, many of them of Dutch descent, found refuge in Nova Scotia. Camminga may well have hoped that some of the Dutch-American Loyalists would settle in or near Lunenburg and thus add to the numbers making up his Reformed congregation. However, that was not to be. The Loyalists generally settled on vacant land, and none appear to have made Lunenburg or its environs their home. Camminga continued to serve the congregation until 1818, the year in which he turned ninety-five. He died two years later, in 1820, and was buried beside his second wife Renée des Camps, beneath the church.

Until 1837 the Lunenburg Reformed Congregation was a totally independent body, but in that year it joined the Halifax Presbytery of the Presbyterian church and was thereafter known as St. Andrew's Presbyterian church. By that time the process of cultural acclimatization had obviously done its work. In 1909 a stained glass window was unveiled in St.Andrew's to the memory of Camminga, and in 1968 his remains and those of his second wife were removed from under the church and reburied behind it. Here a large natural stone bearing a plaque marks their final resting place and helps keep alive their memory in Lunenburg, as does the commemorative window in the church. Furthermore, a large number of sermons preached by Camminga to his congregation are preserved in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, and a portrait of him by his grandson Joseph Brown Comingo was until fairly recently still in the possession of a descendant living in Maine.

Joseph Brown Comingo was one of the first native born and locally trained artists in the Maritimes, perhaps the very first one. Born in Lunenburg in 1784, he was the son of Romkes Comingo and Jane Margaret Bailly Comingo. One may safely assume that his second name, Brown, was in honour of his grandfather Bruin Romkes Camminga, who was frequently referred to simply as Mr. Brown. Not a great deal is known about the life and artistic career of Joseph Brown Comingo, but it is not unreasonable to assume that he received at least part of his formal training, perhaps all of it, from the English artist Robert Field, who worked in Halifax from1808 to 1816. It is especially in the area of portrait painting that Comingo would appear to have received instruction from Field. Like many artists of the day, Comingo was an itinerant, setting up a studio for longer or shorter periods in the main urban centres of the Maritimes like Halifax, Saint John and Fredericton. The restoration of peace in 1815 following the Napoleonic Wars caused a serious economic recession in the Maritimes, and it forced both Field and Comingo to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Field headed for the West Indies; in 1818 or 1819 Comingo took up residence in Baltimore, where Field had also spent some time before coming to Halifax. According to one account, Comingo died in1821 in Nassau, but whether this was Nassau in the Bahamas or in New York State is not indicated. It is not out of the question that he followed his reputed mentor to the West Indies.

Since no thorough study of his life and work has ever been undertaken, we do not know the scope of Comingo's artistic output,something which might be difficult to establish in any case. Nor do we know how many of his works have survived. We do know that he did portraits and landscapes. Many of the portraits would appear to have been miniatures done on ivory, vellum or paper. The landscapes and views of towns were done in watercolour. Portraits which are known to have survived are of his grandfather Bruin Romkes Camminga, of both his parents, of his wife

Elizabeth Winslow Comingo, of Thomas Henry Bailey from Annapolis Royal, of an Eisenhauer girl (or boy) from Lunenburg, of two unidentified men, and of himself. Surviving views of urban centres are those of Saint John, Windsor (Nova Scotia) and Yarmouth, as well as a watercolour depicting the Anglican church in Windsor. Especially the portraits are accomplished works of art and reveal a considerable degree of formal training.

The Loyalists of Dutch descent fleeing the United States who settled in Nova Scotia, near the end of the American Revolution, were not the first Dutch people there. That distinction, so far as we know, belongs to the "foreign Protestants" of the 1750's. And although it would appear that many of that group left the colony before too long, some of those who remained made a considerable mark on the community in which they lived, and indeed on the whole colony. The lives and careers of both Bruin Romkes Camminga and his grandson Joseph Brown Comingo deserve further study.