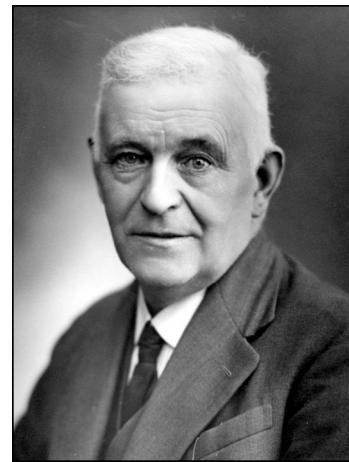


Chapter 2. Ancestral History and Family Lore

The name **van den Born** originated in the Netherlands in the early part of the 18th century—on 19 April 1731, Jan Jacobs (born in 1675, and one of my earliest known ancestors), signed his name on a land transaction document in Renkum for the first time as **Jan Jacobs van den Born**. The records do not indicate why he did this, but family conjecture has it that he may have been employed on a farm called *De Born*, just off a street named the Bornsesteeg, on the edge of Wageningen. I visited the farm in 1988 and spoke briefly with the owners, but they knew nothing about the origin of the farm's name or of any connection it might have with the van den Born name. In the '*Born Boek*', my cousin Peter identifies Jan Jacobs van den Born as Generation 2—his father was Jacob Jans, born in 1641, and is considered Generation 1. In that numbering system, my grandfather is in Generation 8 and I am part of Generation 10.

Willem Hendrik Hendrikus van den Born, the grandfather after whom I am named, was born in 1872, into the miller family of Jan and Hilke van den Born in Lage Vuursche in the Netherlands. After a period of schooling, he worked as a mill hand and learned the miller trade in different locations for a number of years. In 1894, when he was working at a mill in Ede, he suffered a serious accident that he barely survived. His hand was caught in a grain bag hoist and he was hauled up along with a bag of rye. The bag tore when it reached the hoist spindle but, before someone could stop things, Willem went around it and broke both legs and arms in several places. In time he recovered, albeit with crooked legs for the rest of his life. Peter has recorded that in 1872, the year my grandfather



Willem van den Born in 1930

was born, a distant relative, Evert, son of his great-uncle Jan—in current language probably a 'cousin once removed'—died as a result of a similar accident, at the age of 47.

In 1898, four years after his nearly fatal accident, Willem started working at a mill in Terschuur, jointly owned by three well-to-do local farmers (Staal, Schimmel, and Schuld, sometimes apparently referred to as "*de drie Schurken* [the three scoundrels]—likely without intended accusations). Not long after, the good-looking young man met **Gijsje Doppenberg** (born in 1874) in nearby Voorthuizen, and on 18 May 1902 the two got married. They settled in a small house on the mill property in Terschuur and nine months later their first child, my father, came on the scene to enrich their lives.



Willem and Gijsje's wedding in 1902

Johannes Jacobus (Han) van den Born (my father) was born 27 February 1903. He was followed by a daughter (Aal), three more sons (Jan, Jacob, Gerrit), and another daughter (Hillie) in the next ten years, for a total of six children. Dad was smart and, according to family stories from his younger brothers and sisters, was treated as the golden-haired boy who got to go to high school and business school. Peter called him grandfather Willem's favourite son who always got the newest and the best while his own father (Jan) mostly got hand-me-downs. It seems that there was a fair bit of jealousy on the part of some of his younger siblings, perhaps with justification. It seemed to be especially so with respect to *Oom Jan*, Peter's father and the source of much of Peter's information and opinions.

By 1906, the mill operation in Terschuur was poking along slowly but it was not making a lot of money for its three farmer-owners. They owed their main supplier, J. van Vollenhove in Amersfoort, 4,000 guilders and they decided to throw in the towel by letting him have the business to cover their debt. The deal they made included the provision that grandfather Willem could stay on as manager of the operation.



Terschuur and Achterberg are on the map



The house built in 1913, and used as office in 1968

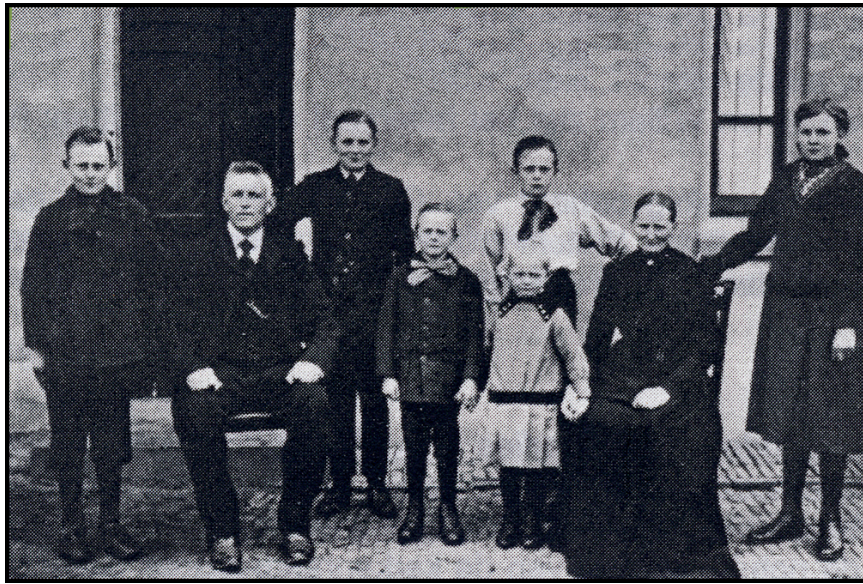
Meanwhile, Willem and Gijsje needed more room for their children. Their youngest one was born in 1913, and that year their small house was replaced by a new and larger one, a house that I remember well and that in later years remained in use as office space for the business, until at least the 1980s.

In 1920, the absentee owner of the business, van Vollenhove, was in financial difficulty and decided to sell the operation, asking 15,000 guilders. My grandparents wanted to purchase the business but the asking price was almost double the amount of money they had been able to save in the meantime.

Nevertheless, they succeeded in making the purchase, especially through my grandmother Gijsje's determination to find and borrow what it took to make the purchase possible. Grandmother continued to look after the money when the

business became their own and helped see the family through, even though the business lost 4,000 guilders the first year. The second year was better; they made a profit of 8,000 guilders!

My dad was 17 at the time of these events, and he was still going to school. He may have had some idea of how his parents managed to get enough money together to purchase the business, but I do not remember him ever talking to us about those experiences. What I have written, therefore, is based on what I read in Peter's '*Born Boek*'. Peter, in turn, based his information on stories from his father, Jan Willem van den Born, born in 1905 as the second oldest son in my grandparents' family.



Willem and Gijsje vanden Born's family around 1920

The first decade probably was not the easiest for the new business owners but they persisted and were successful. At least, when Dad was ready to start his own business in Achterberg in 1929, grandfather Willem helped out with a loan towards the purchase. Rumour and family lore has it that, in the meantime, sibling relations among the van den Borns were not always smooth and gentle—what else is new, really? Stories from his sisters many years later suggest that, in addition to feelings of jealousy among the brothers, there was quite a bit of gender favouritism. On Saturday mornings, for example, “the boys always were allowed to sleep in while the girls had to polish their brothers’ Sunday shoes.” *Tante Aal* reported that, as the oldest girl, she had to help her mother a lot and that “when the men came in they sat down to wait for their meal without so much as lifting a finger to help.”

Dad continued going to school for a number of years, including at least four years at the *Middelbare Handelsschool* in Amersfoort (intermediate business school, 1914-1919) and several years at the *Hogere Handelsschool* (advanced business school) in Rotterdam. Official records for Dad’s life during the 1920s appear to be lost, along with other family documents from those earlier years that were destroyed during World War II, especially during the long evacuation period in 1944-45.

In addition to being at school much of the time, Dad also spent time in officer's training in the Dutch army after 1920. As a consequence, he contributed much less labour to the family business than his younger brothers who went to work for their father as soon as they finished their required six years of schooling. There was plenty of work to do, of course, once grandfather had changed from serving as manager of the business to being its owner.



Willem and Gijsje van den Born in 1930

My maternal grandfather, *Opa Willem Nijboer* (born in 1860), died in early 1937. I was only 4 then and I have no memories of him. Grandmother Nijboer—*Oma* to me—was born **Willempje van Middendorp** in 1865. She lived until 1945, and I certainly remember her. Until recently, however, I knew much less about the ancestral history of the Nijboer side of my family than I knew about the van den Borns. That gap in knowledge was filled at least partly through brother Jack's efforts in 2009 that produced quite a bit of information, at least about the names of many earlier family members. Unfortunately, there were no stories to go with the names. The surname **Nijboer** dates back to 1812 when Willem Nijboer's grandfather, Willem Aartsen, adopted the family name **Nijeboer**, a local dialect version of *Nieuwe Boer* (new farmer).



Willem and Willempje Nijboer in 1930

Opa Willem and *Oma Willempje* were married on 19 January 1894. Soon thereafter they bought the *Dronkelaar* farm, a few kilometers west of Barneveld, apparently with the help of a loan co-signed by Willempje's mother (her father had died when she was only 10). According to an official sale document, the property of 13.4 hectares was purchased by Willem Nijboer on 12 March 1894 for 7500 guilders. The farm was identified as *de boerenhofstede 'Het Achterste Dronkelaar'*. The Nijboers had nine children, of which my mother, **Nennetje (Nen)**, was the seventh,