

Presentation

A journey through time of a group of families, not necessarily related, but sharing the same surname – Coolsaet. The *Chronicles of the Coolsaet Families* record their life stories, paint their daily lives, recounts their ups and downs, and brings out the small and large anecdotes that coloured their daily lives. Some moved to new places, sometimes just a stone's throw away from where they were born, sometimes a little further where work was plentiful – and some even over the horizon to distant lands about which they knew next to nothing. History through the eyes of the Coolsaet tribe.

The roots of the Coolsaet tribe lie in the old County of Flanders. This once extended from Dunkirk to Zelandic Flanders. This is where the family name first appeared and where it was most widespread. Within this large area, present-day West Flanders formed the centre of gravity of the family name. It is there that we find the oldest reference to a specific person named Coolsaet. A Bruges document from 1285 refers to a *Coelzaeds* farmstead in nearby Dudzele, owned (probably) by a *Boudin* (Baldwin) *Coelsaet*. From then on, mentions of the name increased in the county of Flanders. But the name also popped up outside Flanders, in Brussels, Liège and, especially after the fall of Antwerp in 1585, when Protestants fled from Spanish Catholic repression, in Holland.

What's in a name ?

Tracing the origins of surnames is not a straightforward discipline. There are many uncertainties and disputes. The name is said to derive from the High German word *kolsaat* and the Middle High German *kôlsât* and *kôlsâme*, referring to the rapeseed, a bright yellow flower from which oil has been pressed for centuries. The plant is also frequently mentioned in old herbals as a remedy for stomach aches.

From the thirteenth century onwards, when surnames were increasingly used in Flemish towns to distinguish people from each other, this name was given to grain and seed merchants, and in particular to sellers and growers of rapeseed. The French word *colza* is derived from its Dutch counterpart. In English, the words *coleseed* and *rapeseed* (and sometimes *field mustard*) are often used interchangeably.

The spelling sometimes varied: *Coelsaet*, *Coolzaet*, *Koolzaed*, *Colsaet*, *Colzaert*. Until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the spelling could vary even within the same family branch, according to time and place, because in the past deeds were written phonetically (the way the name was pronounced). Sometimes chance played a role in the assignment of the name. For example, there is at least one documented case, in 1817 in Gullegem, West Flanders, of a foundling who was named 'Coolsaet' because he was found in a rapeseed field.

On the waves of nineteenth-century worldwide migration, the family name began to spread. The available archival records indicate that the roots of just about all Coolsaet families in the rest of the world are in one and the same region: the southwest of the present-day province of West Flanders. This diaspora began in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, first to nearby France. Emigration to Wallonia followed in the last quarter of that century and several decades later, at the beginning of the 20th century, to the United States.

These are modest migrations. In Belgium, the name Coolsaet is not very common. It is somewhere in the middle of the top 10,000 most common names. The diaspora of individuals and families with the surname Coolsaet is therefore not very large. This does not make their migration story any less fascinating, for it is the story of sorrow and pain, hope and success, of people who at some point decide to improve their lot by moving to another country.

All these life stories will form the *Chronicles of the Coolsaet families*: the journey through time of a collection of families with the same surname, floating down the flow of time and projected against the background of the events around them.

In the end, the *Chronicles of the Coolsaet families* will look something like this (see the Dutch pages of the website for the full version of the *Chronicles*):

The Coolsaet families in Belgium [in Dutch and partly in French]

West Flanders: center of gravity of the Coolsaet families

The Coolsaet branch in East Flanders

Coolsaet in Brussels

 The Coolsaets of Brussels, from father (and mother) to son (and daughter)

 Family Chronicle – Eight Coolsaet generations between Ghent and Brussels

 Essegheem – From hamlet to district

The Coolsaets of Wallonia

Les Coolsaet en France [in French]

Dunkirk – home to the Coolsaets

Soldiers of Napoleon

The arrival of the first Belgian Coolsaets

Increasingly numerous on French soil...

Diaspora in France

Voyage to America

Preface

Sailing to America

Their ancestors' life in de Old Country

Settling in a new home country

The Coolsaet migration to America – Looking back

Coolsaet in the wider world

Family history research has many uncertainties and unknowns. Information is often scarce, sometimes inadequate, and usually incomplete. The same is true of the life stories in these *Chronicles*.

Time and you, gentle reader, will undoubtedly help to add to and improve what now lies before you. So, for those who browse through these *Chronicles of the Coolsaet families*, consider this an invitation.