

John Edison's Parents

For many years there have been questions about the origins of John Edison, the Loyalist great-grandfather of Thomas A. Edison who fled to Nova Scotia in 1783. The accounts of John being the son of a widow from Holland seemed plausible enough, but no hard data had ever been found to back up those stories. One alternate theory of John's parentage has been receiving considerable attention of late by Sharon Marsalis, Steve Edison, and myself, David Addison. The theory is:

that John Edison, great-grandfather of Thomas A. Edison, was the son of Marselis Ideson (Edeson) and Femmetie Doolhagen (Dorhager) who were married in 1741 in Second River, New Jersey.

This theory recently received support from two sources. One, y-DNA tests showed that a male descendant of John Edison shared the same y-DNA as two male descendants of Ide Marselis b1690 of Holland immigrants. And Ide Marselis was the father of Marselis Ideson(Edeson). Two, an individual by the name of John Marcelas Edah has been found living with Femmetie's family

Findings as of 2018:

1. Recent Y-DNA results show that the male line through John Edison the loyalist, matches the male line through Ide Marselis b 1690. This indicates that John's paternal ancestry should be found in the Ide Marselis paternal line.
2. No birth records have yet been found for John Edison.
3. A 1757 court case in Essex County, N.J. identifies a John Marcelas Edah, and it places him in the residence of John Doolhagen Jr. (b.1727) who was Femmetie's brother (or John Edah's "would be" uncle). Also in the residence is a Lena Doolhagen (b.1696) who was Femmetie's mother (or John Edah's "would be" grandmother) This Lena Doolhagen was likely a widow by 1757. Is this John Marcelas Edah a teenage John Edison being raised by his Doolhagen grandparents and uncle in Acquackanonk, NJ after his mother Femmetie had died?
4. John Edah's age in 1757 would have been about 15, assuming he was born in the year after the couple's marriage.
5. No records of any kind have been found for Femmetie AFTER her 1741 marriage to Marselis. It is presumed that she may have died at, or soon after, John's birth.
6. Records do exist for Marselis Ideson AFTER his 1741 marriage. His surname is recorded as Ydesse, Edison, Edoson, Ederson. A court case in 1745 mentions Marselis Ideson's interest in two properties, one at Second River and one near Bloomfield. A court case in 1782 records a Marshall Ederson who is most likely him. In addition, a Marshall Edison is listed next to John Edison the loyalist, in a Nova Scotia roll call in 1784.

Other supporting information:

The Name:

The name "John Marcelas Edah" is a likely name for the son of Marselis Ideson whose own surname derives from the fact that he was the son of Ide/Ede Marselis, which in the Dutch patronymic system became Ide's-son, or, Ede's-son. Marselis Ideson, his brother Cornelius Ideson, and Cornelius's children, have had the following versions of their surname recorded: Ideson, Anderson, Ydesse, Ydes, Eidese, Edeson, Ederson. The surname "Eda" was used on two occasions by Cornelius Ideson/Ederson, who was Marselis Ideson/Edeson's brother. So the surname Edah was another phonetic interpretation of Ideson/Edeson created during a time when the recording of one's name was usually done by someone else who wrote down a phonetic interpretation.

The middle name of Marcelas had not been known for John Edison so this would be a new finding.

More than that, it ties this John Edison directly to his presumed father, Marselis Ideson.

The given name of John is also a likely name for the son of Femmetie Doolhagen because every male in her immediate family was named John. Her grandfather's given name was Denys Jan, her father was John, her brother was John, and her nephew was John.

The Legend:

The common story regarding Thomas A. Edison is that he was the great-grandson of a widow woman who came from Holland to Acquackanonk, NJ with her 3 year old son John, born in 1727. But it must be remembered that the recollections behind this story were probably not inquired about until after Thomas A. Edison became famous and his biographers began searching his pedigree around 1900. So those biographers had to look back 150 or more years and try to piece together personal family recollections of John Edison's origins. If this new theory is correct, then Thomas' biographers came close, but were a little bit off on the details.

The New Findings:

Known: Jan and Lena Doolhagen came from NYC to Second River about 1728, and moved to Acquackanonk prior to 1741. They had with them a daughter Femmetie born 1724 and their own son John born in 1727.

Known: Femmetie marries Marselis Ideson in 1741 in Second River, NJ

Assumed: Femmetie gives birth to a son John Marcelas Edah.

Assumed because of no records after marriage: Femmetie dies at or soon after childbirth.

Assumed because of new finding: Jan and Lena take over the care of the infant John Ideson. Lena becomes the caregiver of two Johns, one her own son John Doolhagen born 1727, and John Ideson born 1741.

Known: About 1755, Lena becomes a widow, and then lives with her son John Doolhagen Jr. b1727, and her presumed grandson John Marselis Edah b1741.

Notice the similarities between the biographers account and the new findings. The names, the dates, the widow woman, and the location are all strangely similar. And how easy would it have been to confuse the two children of a widow, both named John, one born in 1727 and the other in 1741. This suggests that both the biographers, and the new findings, are describing the same family's history, but that the details got confused.

The Assault:

"NJ Archives, King vs Abraham Van Giesen, Case 21438"

The Doolhagens and John Marcelas Edah were recorded in the 1757 court case as being the target of a forced entry and an assault by a group of individuals aligned with the rioters and squatters who disputed land rights with the East Jersey Proprietors. John Doolhagen Jr. had apparently leased land from the Proprietors, and was legally residing on the property. The small mob claimed the property as their own, and apparently drove the Doolhagens off the property with weaponry. The case names Lena Doolhagen and John Marcelas Edah as victims of assault implying a physical beating of some sort.

Those who supported the Proprietors tended to take the Loyalist side a few years later during the Revolution, while the squatters and rioters favored the Patriots. Could this assault by squatters have fixed a young John's resolve to be a Loyalist?

The Association:

What was this John Marcelas Edah doing in this Doolhagen residence in 1757? The simplest and most likely explanation is that this was young John Edison being raised by his uncle and grandmother, the Doolhagens, possibly due to the loss of his mother Femmetie. Those who attacked the residence considered John as part of the Doolhagen family in the directing of their anger.

The Yeoman/Farmer:

The property dispute paints a picture of John Doolhagen Jr., about 30 years of age, as a yeoman/farmer making a living by leasing, clearing and farming the land. A young John Edison, raised in that environment, would have learned all those skills necessary for clearing and working the land, skills which were very much in evidence when he later carved out homesteads in Nova Scotia and Ontario.

The Doolhagen and Ideson residences:

John Doolhagen Senior b.1701 and Lena Rycken Doolhagen b.1696 are known to have first resided in New York City where their oldest children were born. They moved from there to Second River, New Jersey about 1728 where their youngest children were born. In 1741 they are mentioned as living in Gansegat which describes an area near Fairfield, NJ. They are also mentioned as being from Peckman's River near Cedar Grove. They seemed to be quite mobile and these residences are located in what was formerly Acquackanonk Township which extended from Clifton to Fairfield. The property that John Doolhagen Jr. leased was also in Essex County and probably in the same township. Later in life John Doolhagen Jr. was a farmer in Pequannock Township, Morris County which is north of Fairfield.

Marselis Ideson had interests in one property in Second River and another property near Bloomfield. Although her parents lived in Acquackanonk, Femmetie Doolhagen married Marselis in Second River, which had been her hometown when she was a younger girl. Marselis, Femmetie, and a presumed newborn son may have resided in Second River, or in Fairfield, until the event that required the young boy to be placed in the care of the Doolhagens.

Conclusion:

1. The latest finding that a John Marcelus Edah, in 1757, was residing with the immediate family of his presumed mother, provides the strongest circumstantial evidence to-date that John Edison was the son of Marselis Ideson/Edeson and Femmetie Doolhagen.
2. The court recorded name of John Marcelus Edah ties a presumed John Edison to Marselis Ideson/Edeson with both the Middle name and the Surname. The Given name John, ties him to Femmetie Doolhagen's family tradition where all the males were named John.
3. The surname Edah is one of several, similar, phonetic iterations of the name which later became Edison.
4. The legend of John Edison's origin has him arriving in Acquackanonk, New Jersey as a 3 year old with a young widowed mother. In view of the new findings, John probably arrived in Acquackanonk as a 3 year old with his maternal grandmother whose daughter had just died, and his grandmother soon became a widow.
5. The latest findings suggest that John Edison's parentage may be different than what has commonly been accepted, and that a later birth-date in New Jersey is more likely.
6. Researchers should focus on the Doolhagen family, and Marselis Ideson and Femmetie Doolhagen, in order to confirm or eliminate John Marcelas Edah as John Edison.

Related theories:

There are two other theories regarding John Edison's parentage which should be mentioned in view of this latest finding. One was that John Marcelas Edah's parents could have been Cornelius Ideson and Dorietje Vreeland. Cornelius Ideson (b.1718) was Marselis Ideson's (b.1714) younger brother and he used the same surname. Most references place Cornelius in Second River where he raised a family of seven children beginning in 1738 and ending in 1756. All seven of his known children's birth/baptism records are recorded at the Second River Dutch Reformed Church, but there is no record for a son named John. Also working against this theory is the question as to why a son of Cornelius and Dorietje would be found in the Doolhagen household. But it is possible that he could have been there as a cousin or a hired hand, so this theory cannot be dismissed entirely by this latest finding, but it does become weaker.

A second theory is that John Marcelus Edah was a son of Ide/Ede Marselis(b1690) who was the father of Marselis Ideson and Cornelius Ideson. Ide Marselis raised a second family in the Hunterdon area after the mother of Marselis and Cornelius died. In his second family there were 8 or 9 known children born between 1718 and 1739. Two facts working against Ide being the father of John Marcelas Edah are, one, all of Ide's second family children had the surname of Marselis. Secondly, Ide had already named a son John, a John Mersalis born in 1723. This theory seems even weaker in view of the latest findings.