

On Vermeer's house; closing remarks on Grijzenhout's writings

H.Slager, november 2025

Past researchers and Frans Grijzenhout today adhere to the idea Johannes Vermeer's house¹ was at the eastern corner Molenpoort-Oude Langendijk, the house named Serpent, where he and his family would have lived with his mother-in-law Maria Thins. The notion has been repeatedly used in various media in the decades prior to my own studies (2017/2018) that were the first to thoroughly re-evaluate the housing situation in the Delft Papenhoek (Papist corner) after John Michael Montias' elaborate studies² and resulted in a new candidate for Vermeer's house, the one on the western corner of the Molenpoort named Trappmolen³.

In april 2024 Grijzenhout published his article on Vermeer's supposed house entitled "Finding Vermeer, back to the Molenpoort"⁴ to which I reacted critically in my paper "Vermeer's house again and the Jesuit church"⁵. In turn he then reacted⁶ to my critiques that according to him would consist of "all kinds of disparaging phrases about his research". This is unfortunate but I cannot help how critiques are received and as any reader can observe they were factual and analytical. Perhaps his poor reception is reason he tries to discredit my academic stance in the matter⁷.

"Vermeer's house again and the Jesuit church" addresses the flaws in his method of using the Familiegeld 1674 ledger⁸ to sequentially place the listed persons in houses around the Molenpoort, with the ultimate goal of locating Vermeer's house. That is, indirectly via his mother-in-law as Vermeer himself is not listed. However, the ledger is not a reliable tool which will be (again) explained in this paper. Additionally, the method relies in part on assumptions/guesswork. The archival data I supplied clearly contradict with several of the assumptions and vice-versa searching Grijzenhout's writings for archival facts in support of the assumptions, none were found. As a result, his method does not bring anything new- nor does it bring any extra certainty on the location of Vermeer's house. Trappmolen remains the most likely candidate.

Nb. In this paper the house codes as in "Johannes Vermeer and his neighbours"(2017) are used. They are easy to understand: e.g. OLD-E3 is Oude Langendijk 3rd house east of the Molenpoort and OLD-W2 is 2nd house west of the Molenpoort etc. See also the figures .

¹ For ease of reading 'Vermeer's house' is used but he never owned a house on the Oude Langendijk.

² J.M.Montias (1989) "Johannes Vermeer and his milieu, a web of social history".

³ H.Slager (2018) "Vermeer's house revisited" at www.essentialvermeer.com. The notion Vermeer's house likely was Trappmolen has been accepted by P.Roelofs in "Closer to Vermeer, a look inside the family home of the Delft painter" in "Vermeer" the exhibition catalogue Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (2023) and by Delft house researchers at www.achterdegevelsvandelft.nl (Oude Langendijk no.25).

⁴ F.Grijzenhout (april 2024) "Finding Vermeer-back to the Molenpoort" at www.essentialvermeer.com.

⁵ H.Slager (october 2024) Vermeer's house again and the Jesuit church "at www.essentialvermeer.com.

⁶ F.Grijzenhout (2025) "A brief reply to Hans Slager on the issue of Vermeer's residence" at www.essentialvermeer.com.

⁷ Ibid 6. He uses phrases like "not liking an idea" or "wants us to believe" or "finds it difficult to accept".

⁸ Familiegeld 1674 was discovered and transcribed by Kees van der Wiel. An early review on his discovery was in 1997 (J.M. Montias, Oud Holland 111, no. 3, p196)

To place a person at a house Houses and their owners along a street in general were sequentially ordered in 17th-18th century property taxation books but often we encounter complicating factors attempting to place someone at an exact house. Some houses were situated behind those at the street, only accessible via a corridor/gate. Others were split up, for renting out or as an actual division in ownership, and some may have been fused. Such variations –and many other reasons– make placing a person a challenge at times and multiple primary sources are almost always needed for reconstruction. These primary sources are archival documents like haardstedengeld, huizenprotocol, verponding, kadegeld, notary deeds, notary house sale deeds, waarbrieven, city charters and weeskamer. Data from these need to be combined as a single source is often insufficient to make firm statements. Also genealogical analysis is often needed to reconstruct the names in the records; not only the family structure but also neighbours, friends, debtors that could help in determining a person’s residence.

Familiegeld 1674 Different from the tax books mentioned above, Familiegeld 1674 is not a property tax but a tax on a person’s wealth. Grijzenhout declares that the name order in the ledger is derived from an imaginary walk along a street and thus can be used to locate Vermeer (i.e. via his mother-in-law) at an exact house, by simply following the name order. But unfortunately this idea is not viable; the method has several intrinsic problems and needs assumptions/guesses.

1. The name order in Familiegeld 1674 does not strictly align with the name order in the primary property tax books; some owners/inhabitants emerge at a different position from what we know from the primary sources. I have called this ‘jumbled’. The same jumbling occurs in a later tax on wealth, the Personele Quotisatie 1690⁹. When reconstructing the Papenhoek into a map of owners/inhabitants (2017) I did not use Familiegeld 1674 because of this relatively poor fit with primary sources and its incompleteness in names (it only lists taxable persons).

2. The names in Familiegeld 1674 can be house owner, tenant or yet another capacity but the ledger itself doesn’t say. Some known owners in the area, wealthy enough to be taxed are missing so we must find out who lived in their property, including persons not mentioned in the ledger (like Vermeer) and we must consult other sources (when available). Evidently, taxable persons that do not own a house cannot be checked against a property register and for tenants (or any other reason for residing) we need to have additional sources, otherwise placing is an assumption only.

3. Some house owners apparently residing in their own house in 1674 were not listed in the ledger because their wealth was below the taxation threshold of 1,000 guilders (for instance Cornelia Dircks in OLD-W2). But this doesn’t mean another person in the ledger couldn’t be their tenant (or living with them). So we cannot dismiss such houses offhand when placing names.

4. Many unmarried women, so-called *klopjes* (catholic lay nuns) resided in the Papenhoek area. In burial records they are denoted as *bejaerde dogter* (often abbreviated to *b:d*) indicating they never married and had no children. Some of these *klopjes* may have lived together and so placing does not necessarily follow a ‘one-person one-house’ rule. Not all spinsters were *klopjes* though, for instance Jannetje Stevens who will be discussed below.

⁹ See table-1 in “Vermeer’s house again and the Jesuit church” showing the jumbling.

Considering the variety in problems described above, the simple method of sequentially placing names at exact houses on the Oude Langendijk is already unreliable by itself. And this becomes worse when assumptions have to be made and when archival records actually contradict them.

Grijzenhout's latest paper cannot be left without another (last) detailed reply and so once more the archival facts on a few key names in *Familieregeld 1674* will be given: the sisters Maria & Cornelia Van Swieten, the unrelated namesake Maria Teresia van Swieten and Jannetje Stevens (Van Swethoeck) as their houses are different from what Grijzenhout claims. Such details are relevant to the question where Vermeer's house stood as Grijzenhout's method is largely based on sequential placing.

At the end of this paper a schematic is included to show how the names in *Familieregeld 1674* might be placed with some level of confidence (figure-1).

The sisters Maria & Cornelia Van Swieten The so-called *Memorie-1686* document written by the Jesuits¹⁰ clearly tells the sisters Maria & Cornelia van Swieten lived on the Oude Langendijk west of the Molenpoort, in the 3rd or 4th house west (OLD-W3/4). This is because of two significant annotations (i) "*neffens Elisabeth Cornelis et M.Oem*" meaning 'next to' and (ii) "*staat op mevr. Van Nerven*" meaning their house was owned by the lady Van Nerven. M(eester) Oem (Ooms) owned/lived in the 5th house west (OLD-W5), the house of his mother in law, the widow Machtelt Van Nerven (maiden name Van Beest). In 1686 Van Nerven paid the property tax for OLD-W3/4 (respectively 5 and ca. 6.7 guilders) and Maria & Cornelia paid a yearly rent of 60 guilders to the Jesuits. Of the two houses, theirs likely was OLD-W4 being the larger one; Elizabeth Cornelis in OLD-W3 paid the much lower rent of 25 guilders¹¹. Ownership in *Memorie 1686* is straightforward but peculiarly Grijzenhout rejects that the listed name for property tax, Van Nerven, means she owned the house(s)¹². Everything in *Memorie 1686* tells the name for property tax was the official/legal owner¹³ and save one yet undetermined name at the Burgwal, all owners match those in city records.

Rejecting that the sisters resided west of the Molenpoort, Grijzenhout has them owning the 3rd house east (OLD-E3) instead. Such ownership is demonstrably not the case as shown by the records. Firstly, after Jan Geenz Thins (died 1647) no further owners for this house are recorded in the housing protocol. Secondly, in *Memorie 1686* the house becomes noteworthy absent in both the tax- and rent list, most probably meaning it had been (long) integrated into the Jesuit station. And thirdly it is the namesake Maria Teresa van Swieten who should be placed at OLD-E3, not as owner but as a proxy for tax (see below).

The logical scenario is that the never-married Van Swieten sisters lived in their parent's house west of the Molenpoort and stayed there after it was bought by Van Nerven in 1653. Buying- and renting out property in the Papenhoek was precisely what she did; the rent wasn't for her but for the Jesuits as a method of sponsoring. The *Memorie-1686* tells this whole story of ownership and tenants paying rent in the Papenhoek.

¹⁰ H.Slager (2017) "Johannes Vermeer and his neighbours". Addendum 11 & 12 with original source. Addendum 12 is an extra check of the house-name reconstruction via comparison of tax height. Published at www.essentialvermeer.com

¹¹ Without any argumentation Grijzenhout puts Lysbeth Cornelis in Trapmolen (OLD-W1) in 1686. *Memorie 1686* however clearly tells she resided in OLD-W3, because of Oem in OLD-W5 and the tax height check (note 10; addendum 12).

¹² Ibid 4. His note 11.

¹³ The words used in *Memorie 1686* are: "*staet op naam van*" (recorded on the name of) or "*op den naam*" (on the name of..) or "*ook op*" (also on <the name of>; when following a previous entry). They unmistakably indicate the owner. Grijzenhout will be aware Van Nerven never owned a house east of the Molenpoort.

So, one may be wondering, despite the facts to the contrary, why is Grijzenhout so adamant in placing the sisters in the 3rd house *east* of the Molenpoort ? We can only assume his position must have to do with first placing Maria Thins in Serpent (OLD-E1) and because the sisters come *after* Maria Thins in the name list, he just has to place them further east (his sequential placement runs from west to east). This placing error is an example of the jumbled nature of Familiegeld 1674.

Lastly, a schematic should reflect the street map as accurate as possible. Grijzenhout however does not follow my original schematic/count of houses west of the Molenpoort¹⁴ but uses his adapted copy omitting one house¹⁵, in the records noted as “*two houses under one roof*” that are the 3rd and 4th house west (OLD-W3/4). Obviously, when a house(hold) is omitted it doesn’t need consideration in placing but it is precisely this house pair that is Maria & Cornelia’s parental house and that Memorie 1686 describes in detail with inhabitants and owner (Van Nerven). The street map of 1832 (Kadastrale minuut) still shows these two houses demonstrating they were a steady configuration (figure-2).

Maria Teresia van Swieten It was Maria Teresa (T(h)eresia) van Swieten who paid Kadegeld tax in 1667 for the 3rd house *east* of the Molenpoort (OLD-E3). Grijzenhout plainly rejects this without motivation, but evidently this fact contradicts his claim the house was lived in (even owned) by the two sisters Van Swieten.

Maria Teresia van Swieten is a known name in the group of Jesuit sponsors. Several property tax books for OLD-E3 mention Maria van Swieten (singular), never Maria & Cornelia. It is only Familiegeld 1674 and Personele Quotisatie 1690 that mention the two sisters and as noted these ledgers have a different character as they are about wealth, not about a particular house. Kadegeld 1667 gives the title ‘*Juffr*’ indicating a lady of standing which Maria Teresa was (although the title appears not exclusively used for the wealthy). Being only heir she is indirectly traceable in Familiegeld 1674 in the entry of her deceased parents (“*estate of Sophia van Swieten, widow of Andries van Swieten*”). Her mother had died in 1661¹⁶ and the tax of 435 guilders makes her one of the richest persons in Delft (top 5%). Her father (died 1652) owned a house on the Burgwal¹⁷ situated just below the Jesuit church that was passed onto her and husband Reijnier Carlier¹⁸ after her parent’s demise. So it is likely that besides in her house in Antwerp -and in the Bagijnhof in Delft (named ‘Passer’ like her father’s former brewery) she may well have stayed in the Papenhoek at times and paid Kadegeld tax to the collector as the illegal Jesuits could not pay themselves. There is more evidence from a charter dating 15-01-1687 concerning the demolition of some sheds and a waste place on the Nieuwe Kerckhof, a strip of land between the New Church and the Oude Langendijk¹⁹. Twelve house owners and residents on the Oude Langendijk in a row, all demonstrably residing (or owning houses) *east* of the Molenpoort (stopping with OLD-E3) receive a special tax. In a period spanning some months prior to the final charter the owners appear individually for the magistrates. One of them is Adriaan

¹⁴ Ibid 10. Addendum 2 & 3.

¹⁵ Grijzenhout draws- and numbers a single house.

¹⁶ Buried 26-02-1661 Sophia van de Wiel, bij de Haaghpoort

¹⁷ Ibid 10. House BW-E7.

¹⁸ Several spellings (Renarus, Renier, Reinier, Kalier, Karlier, Charlier).

¹⁹ Ibid 10. Addendum 7.

Wittert, son- and heir of Johan Wittert, owner of the Jesuit churchhouse (OLD-E4/5)²⁰ who appears on 15-11-1686 for himself and as representative for (sic) *“The children and heirs of the late Maria van Swieten”*. The tax payer in 1667 for OLD-E3 therefore clearly was not the Maria van Swieten Grijzenhout claims, as (i) she was an unmarried spinster without children (buried Oude Langendijk, 10-02-1687, *bejaerde dogter*) and (ii) her demise is some three months later than the date of 15-11-1686 in the charter stating Maria van Swieten had died²¹.

There really is no other conclusion: the tax payer of OLD-E3 in 1667 is Maria Teresa van Swieten whose name (i.e. Maria van Swieten) is repeated in several later property tax books, and even long after she died. She -aka the widow Carlier- was one of the sponsors of the covert Jesuits paying the property tax in 1686 which they could not pay themselves²². Why she (in casu her heirs-) was taxed by the city in 1687 regarding the land strip is a guess; she didn't own a house on the Oude Langendijk so it must have had to do with her close relation to the Jesuits, after all she is recorded payer of Kadegeld tax. More information on her close relationship with the Jesuits is found in 1662. On 06-05-1662 the notary Cornelis Bleiswijk²³ draws up a deed in which Sebastiaen Ipelaer and his wife Emmerentia Sandeling declare a debt of 2,000 guilders to Juffr. Maria van Swieten, widow of Reijnier Karlier²⁴. The same day a copy of the deed was delivered to Roelant Pottere, the head of the Jesuit station on the Oude Langendijk. Inside the deed remarkably a little personal letter survives, signed Maria Teresa van Swieten, dated 22-05-1662 in Antwerp, in which she asks the notary a copy of the deed to be delivered to a Mr. van Velde²⁵. Evidently Maria Teresa was intimately involved with the Jesuits to the point they even received copies of personal documents.

Maria van Swieten, last remarks Grijzenhout phrases the following (his note 11) as if it would be summary evidence for his claim the Van Swieten sisters lived in OLD-E3: *“Maria van Swieten is mentioned as the owner resp. inhabitant of the third house east of Molenpoort in Kadegeld 1667, Familiegeld 1674 (together with her sister Cornelia), Personele Quotisatie 1690 (again with her sister Cornelia, and with a reference to their brother Leendert; I will not go into the peculiarities of this register), and Verponding 1733-1795”*.

As I have shown, the Maria van Swieten in Kadegeld 1667, regardless which Maria, never owned OLD-E3 nor was she a regular inhabitant. Regarding the tax Personele Quotisatie 1690 I have previously aligned the names and houses to show this ledger too is partly jumbled and it does not show in any way Maria & Cornelia lived east of the Molenpoort. The property tax book Verponding 1733-1795 lists Maria van Swieten at OLD-E3²⁶ but as discussed this is Maria Teresa van Swieten whose name was kept in the tax books for a long time.

Jannetje Stevens In my paper I mentioned that Jannetje Stevens -a recorded owner of OLD-W6 in the housing protocol- may have lived in this house at the time (i.e. 1674). The exact year she purchased the house was not yet known though; Grijzenhout has now retrieved that date, namely 1679. He transformed her into my “key” objection to his paper for she would live in Trapmolen (OLD-W1)²⁷ but I think it is obvious to any reader my critiques concerned his method as a whole. In the many

²⁰ Ibid 10. House OLD-E4/5.

²¹ Her burial date could not be found in the Delft archives. Possibly she died in Antwerpen.

²² Ibid 10. Addendum 11 and 12.

²³ Delft archives, ONAD 1911.

²⁴ Note her middle name Teresa is again not written, as Grijzenhout claims was always the case.

²⁵ Ibid 10. This Van de Velde is possibly the owner of the house on the Burgwal just beneath the church (BW-E4).

²⁶ Table-2 in “Vermeer’s house again and the Jesuit church”.

²⁷ Ibid 3. Thus preventing Vermeer to have lived- and died there.

references Grijzenhout supplies on the (previous) owners of OLD-W6 none however provide a single clue to place Jannetje Stevens in Trapmolen. That she became an owner of OLD-W6 in 1679 (and 1680 for OLD-W8) does not in any way equate proof she lived in Trapmolen in 1674 nor do her house purchases validate his sequential placing method, as Grijzenhout spins it. The only certainties regarding Jannetje Stevens are (i) she resided *somewhere* near the Molenpoort in 1674 and (ii) not as a house owner. Choosing Trapmolen as her residence is Grijzenhout's own personal preference²⁸.

Actually, one clue we *do* have opposes his choice as the widow Van Nerven bought houses in the Papenhoek for catholic tenants only and Jannetje Stevens wasn't catholic²⁹. The only deducible/documentated fact we currently have is from a later time; a lady named Maritie Cleij likely lived in Trapmolen in 1686³⁰.

On Vermeer's and Maria Thins' house It is perhaps good to emphasize the idea of a shared household of Vermeer and Maria Thins is based on a single record in 1666 that reflects the year 1663³¹. The shared household has become somewhat of an *idée fixe* in some people's minds leading to rather static positions and instead it would be healthy to acknowledge we only have a few facts and other scenarios of household could certainly be possible.

In my analysis, Vermeer very likely went to live in Trapmolen at some point in time³² and at least until his demise in 1675 and this should be seen regardless of Maria Thins' residence. After he died, we don't know what his wife Catharina did next: did she stay in the house until she relocated to Breda around 1684? Without archival facts we have no way of telling at present. Vermeer is first noticed at the Oude Langendijk in 1660, three years before Maria Thins' earliest record at this street. We don't know for certain if Maria Thins lived in Trapmolen with Vermeer³³ or for how long, or that she in fact started there and moved out, or that she never lived there at all. If not Trapmolen, she could have lived in another house on the Oude Langendijk, including Serpent or for example OLD-E2 that had been owned by step family (Camerling). It does not disagree with the archival records we currently have, as apart from her burial record in 1680 that mentions "*Oude Langendijk corner Molenpoort*" no other record in her lifetime locates her exactly (they just mention "*here in Delft*" or "*Oude Langendijk*"). She bought a garden & house in the Annebogert area in Delft at an unknown date prior to 1679, but Grijzenhout argues it wasn't for residential living. Perhaps not, but whatever the case at least it indicates things were not static, also exemplified by her apparent stay for several years (1676-

²⁸ In fact, in between Jannetje Stevens and Maria Thins three more names are listed and should we follow Grijzenhout's sequential listing they would actually 'outrank' Jannetje Stevens to be in Trapmolen. Taking it even further, as we have neither evidence for- or against any of these four ladies, Maria Thins would be next in line but obviously she would not be his choice.

²⁹ Jannetje Stevens' demise in 1702 is absent in the catholic St. Joseph parish register. Delft Archive 437, Inv.14.

³⁰ Ibid 10. Grijzenhout however in the second version of his schematic (his paper; note 6) has now removed Maritie Cley from the area altogether. No reason was given.

³¹ Ibid 2. Doc 305 and p160. The notion of a shared household is based on a deposition in 1666 on Willem Bolnes' domestic violence in 1663.

³² The earliest mention of Vermeer residing on the Oude Langendijk is 1660 when a child of his was buried. We do not know the exact location though.

³³ Trapmolen in earlier times was part of a milling operation. In Vermeer's time the house may in fact have been combined with one or two smaller houses (in 1686 and in later ledgers four houses and a warehouse are recorded). If they indeed shared a household, Maria Thins and Vermeer would have had more space than the quay side house alone.

1678/1679) with her cousins Rozendael in The Hague³⁴ before turning up in Delft again for her final year.

Maria Thins' cousins Rozendael are recorded to rent Serpent in 1686, but on its own this clue is not enough to place her definitively. The Memorie 1686 document describes the situation in that specific year but the situation is Maria Thins had died six years earlier, Vermeer had died eleven years earlier and Catharina was in Breda³⁵ so it is impossible to draw a clear picture between these events. Grijzenhout thinks Maria Thins' wealth as given in Familiegeld 1674 is a strong reason she would have lived in a large house like Serpent. But is it ? She is first noticed at the Oude Langendijk in 1663 and roughly 15 years earlier she had rented a house at the Vlamingstraat followed by one at the Brabantse Turfmarkt³⁶. Evidently, other than the garden/gardenhouse named Fonteijn in the Annebogert area, she never was interested in buying a house in Delft and if this is anything to go by, 'status' might not have been that important to her. And was she wealthy in the sense of spending power ? Perhaps not even that much; she didn't help Catharina to prevent a large debt by 1676 and in 1684 she even needed to borrow money. It is likely the majority of Maria Thins' wealth was tied up in lands, bonds, debtors and so on, but even when she would have plenty of cash to spend, it doesn't mean she wouldn't be content renting something small as it all depends on one's preferences and we cannot presume to know hers.

For all these uncertainties regarding Maria Thins I have indicated her residence with question marks in figure-1.

³⁴ Ibid 4.

³⁵ Catharina was buried in 1687 from her daughter's house in Delft.

³⁶ Ibid 10, p7 with sources. We do not know how long Maria Thins resided in these houses.

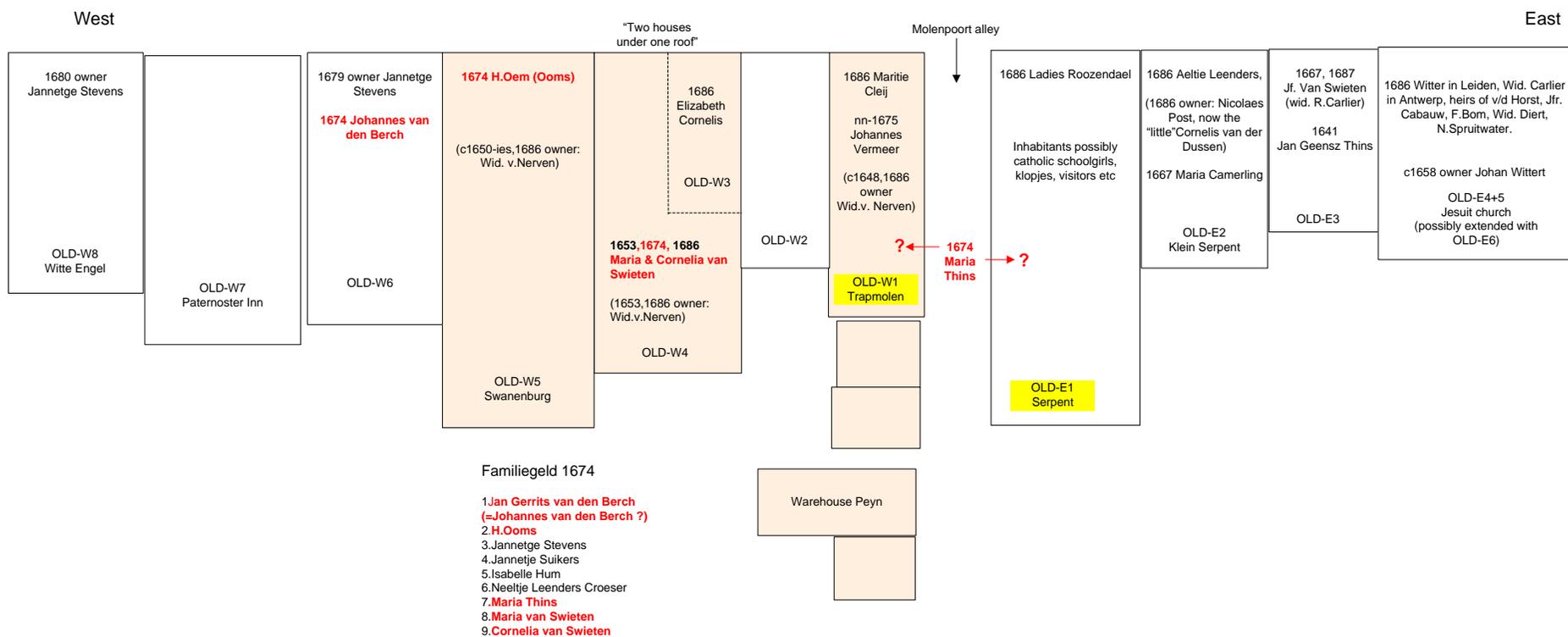


Figure-1 Houses on the Oude Langendijk near the Molenpoort with names from Familiegeld 1674 and a few other key names. Many other names are known but omitted as they hold no clues regarding placement of names in Familiegeld 1674. Coloured-in houses were owned by the widow van Nerven (her other houses at the Burgwal are not shown). The year 1686 denotes the Memorie-1686 document. Names in red are the names in Familiegeld 1674 that can be placed with a level of confidence through archival records. Jannetje Stevens and the other three ladies cannot be placed; they did not own a house in 1674 and we have no facts- or good clues where they resided. OLD-E4/5 is the Jesuit church which possibly was enlarged with the adjacent house OLD-E6 (see reference in note 5).



Figure-2 Kadastrale Minuut map 1832. Houses on the Oude Langendijk near the Molenpoort alley. The back side of OLD-E1 (Serpent) at this time had been demolished. OLD-W3/4 is two separate houses.